

RICE UNIVERSITY

**The Pragmatics of Hope: Class, Elections and Political Management
in Contemporary Colombia.**

by

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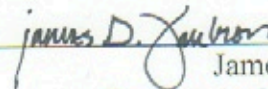
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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the recent introduction of U.S.-style, image-based political management techniques into Colombian politics, a phenomenon facilitated by the comprehensive market and political reforms of the 1990s. The Colombian elites who favored these reforms hoped to dismantle the clientelistic networks of private interests that, in their view, perpetuated a corrupt, ineffective, and at times, collusive two-party system. They hoped that a multi-party system would provide Colombian voters with real political choice. However, despite these efforts, clientelism continues to thrive under the new regime. With party/faction loyalty no longer the dominant driver in elections, campaigns now hire political managers to guide voters' choices based on individual candidates' appeal. Ironically, these practices have created "electoral industries," networks of voters organized around political figures as opposed to party platforms. These electoral industries have easily adapted to existing clientelistic networks, the very networks the reforms were meant to dismantle. Meanwhile, through the language of market segmentation, political elites have publicly moralized clientelism's resilience, characterizing it as a persistent, anti-modern behavior that can be objectively correlated with lower class voters. Their portrait of clientelism stands in stark contrast to the liberal political subjectivity (grounded in individual choice) that they attribute to urban middle and upper classes. According to these ideas, political managers mobilize specific

technologies meant to more effectively manage each kind of vote. While lower class voters are managed through face-to-face networks and informal channels of communication, middle and upper class voters are reached through broadcast media and web-based social media. By looking at the institutional platforms, expert knowledge, political technologies and normative political ideas at work in the organization of these environments for political participation, my work explores the features of liberalism that allow clientelism and media-based politics to coexist, and even thrive, under a single system. Specifically, I trace the emergence of a form of “strategic citizenship,” to borrow Partha Chatterjee’s term, that I argue is the latest guise that the transactional dimensions of liberalism has taken.

Acknowledgements

When receiving the Nobel Prize in 1954, Ernest Hemingway wrote in his acceptance speech: “Writing, at its best, is a lonely life.” The trope of the lonely writer is familiar to Anthropologists. We are storytellers, and sometimes we feel isolated when telling the stories of our remote trips to distant lands -- lands that take many forms, from physical space to systems of thought. But, this dissertation and my experience of writing it, rather than a lonely quest has been a collaborative effort. The different conversations I’ve had with mentors, informants, colleagues, family and friends have shaped the lens through which I understand Colombian politics and global liberalism.

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Introduction

The Colombian congressional and presidential elections in 2010 were the first elections in which web based social media were used for campaigning purposes. The introduction of these new technologies in electoral politics revived long-standing debates in Colombian public culture about the pragmatics and ideals of politics in a country marked by social exclusion and war. During these elections, the different spaces used for political campaigning embodied a widespread sense that class radically fractures Colombia. Political campaigners, political analysts and the broader public saw the use of the new social media spaces and other media as the natural environment of a middle and upper class urban vote, commonly known as the *voto de opinión* [opinion or informed vote]. The spaces of face-to-face politics, on the other hand, were mostly associated with poor urban and rural populations, known as *voto amarrado* [tied vote]. The *voto de opinión* is thought to be an informed and free voter who will vote moved by individual thoughts and emotions. The *voto amarrado*, on the contrary, is conceived to be the voter moved by economic need, who belongs to close-knit networks of allegiance and seeks security through these networks. This conceived split in political subjectivity is rehashed election after election, and informs the planning and implementation of campaign strategies, as well as the design of the spaces for political participation.

This dissertation looks at the mechanisms by which political elites have reproduced forms of social distinction within politics despite a nominal commitment to participatory politics, political inclusion and multiculturalism. I pay special attention to how notions of political modernity and pre-modernity, the values associated with political

properness and democratic ideals are mapped to match different class environments. Political marketing has provided the technical tools for political elites to de-politicize class discourses and present them as objective observations on political behavior. I particularly look at how the language of market segmentation has been appropriated by political elites to reproduce a vertical social order and segmented forms of political participation. For this purpose, I take a close look at the political marketing and management industry in Colombia during elections, as well as the electoral monitoring NGOs standing in opposition and that work everyday to transform Colombia's authoritarian political culture.

At first glance, this may seem as a familiar story: elites reproducing class divisions by juxtaposing discourses of political modernity to refer to their political values, and discourses of anti-modernity to scorn "traditional" forms of political behavior. But the story that I tell in this dissertation is different. I argue that the introduction of political marketing into Colombian politics, and the moralization of media-based politics and clientelism as opposed forms of political practice, unveil the complex relations between political choice and political interest in market-centered democracies. As it will be explored in chapter three, self-interest, an attribute that identifies clientelistic networks, was central in shaping a rational, liberal subject (Hirschman 1977). With industrialization, and the appearance of mass-market environments where workers and owners participated alike, self-interest was opposed to the public good. Therefore, in this dissertation, I step from normative notions about political cultures prevalent in social science scholarship and rather look at clientelistic networks and media-centered politics as two expressions of the transactional dimensions

of liberalism. By looking at the technologies, expert practices, epistemological matrices, social positions and affective worlds of the actors that mobilize elections in Colombia, I locate Colombia's political contradictions within the history, mutations and translations of liberalism itself.

The ethnographic material of this project was collected during preliminary fieldwork visits to Colombia during the summers of 2007 and 2008 and during a yearlong field research from September 2009 to October 2010. Since the beginning of my PhD, I was interested in the formation of political subjectivity in Colombia. However, getting to the topic of political consultants and political expertise entailed exploring detours and dead-ends, that in retrospect, have enriched my view of Colombian politics in a global context. Throughout the different chapters, I interweave my previous interests on cynicism, humor, satire and literary genres with a macro-political analysis of liberalism, a perspective that I honed through my personal fascination with post-socialist scholarly work and its relation to Latin America. As signaled throughout, some of the ethnographic vignettes in this dissertation as well as some of the interviews were collected during previous visits to Colombia when I sought to tackle this question of late-liberal politics from other perspectives.

The majority of the ethnographic material, however, was collected during the elections of 2010. When I arrived in Bogotá, the project of this dissertation was not yet formed. Still I was hanging on to my interest in political satire. This interest took me to interview political consultants and media makers who had worked in the format of political satire in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The interviews and informal conversations about the shifts and turns of their careers, and the environment of elections

that we were living in, presented political marketing as an exciting opportunity to observe how this ethereal thing we broadly name politics becomes tangible, experienceable and observable through the specific techniques used to mobilize elections. Additionally, I was strategically placed. Many of my friends in Colombia had direct or indirect connections with the world of politics, and just by means of referral and talking to people about my research interests, I got access to top political strategists, politicians, political managers, media consultants, political journalists and local political leaders. Surprisingly, instead of finding a field of extreme secrecy, I found a network of people happy to share their work with an uninformed stranger asking obvious and naive questions.

I paired this work among political networks with the work as a political activist. I found a job as the international coordinator for a local NGO that promoted civic electoral monitoring practices - Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE). This job opened the doors to observe the opposite face of electoral politics: that of the promotion of transparency practices in the electoral process. Working with MOE, I had the golden opportunity to carry out ethnographic research among national and international networks that sponsor best-democratic practices in Colombia. All of these networks generously shared their work with me, as well.

Although politicians, political strategists and activists generously opened their worlds and practices to my prying eye, throughout the dissertation I use different narratives techniques to conceal their identities while dealing with sensitive information. In the time I spent among these networks, we built relationships of trust that I am strongly indebted to honor. Therefore, I use pseudonyms, fictional characters composed of multiple informants, and leave political affiliations ambiguous to protect their

identities. I only use names and last names to reveal and make explicit my informants' identities, also a request that I am required to honor.

The multiple locations I inhabited during fieldwork, and the multiple friendships I made regardless of my informants' leaning in the political spectrum, shaped this project. As will be explored in the next section, this project has several analytical registers that are constantly at play. My choice to pay attention to matters of scaling in the narrative intends to make tangible a sense of dislocation often experienced in Colombian politics brought about by abrupt political and economic reform. During these dense times when broad macro-structural reforms intermingle with people's daily lives, the overlapping of what social scientists fashion as analytical scales is experienced in everyday life. Throughout the dissertation, I gesture to these fissures and overlaps.

Going global

Throughout the world, the opening of national economies to international markets, and the introduction of 'laissez faire' attitudes towards the economy required deep institutional reforms that have severely transformed daily life and individual subjectivity in different parts of the world (Paley 2001; Richard and Rudnycky 2009). One of the most noticeable transformations brought about by neoliberal economics has been the reformulation of liberty to be understood as individual choice and realized through consumption (Rose 1999). This market-oriented understanding of liberty has entered the political arena to redefine what liberal politics looks like and has deeply impacted our universal notions of democracy. A democratic country is not defined

anymore by the state's ability to administer vital services for its population, but by having an array of political options to vote for during elections. Under this contemporary conception of democratic politics, more political parties and more political candidates amount for a healthy political system (Payne et al. 2007). And in many parts of the world, citizens that do not have the means to consume have had to learn how to strategically navigate these new conditions in order to access private and public services (Chatterjee 2006; Westbrook 2004). The revolutionary promises that neoliberal reform once represented for countries seeking political stability and economic prosperity has disappeared as wealth inequality, authoritarian political cultures and social unrest mushroom in many parts of the world.

This dissertation focuses on the introduction of business and market logics into politics via the development of the political marketing industry. In this new iteration of liberalism, a transactional and contractual doctrine (Westbrook 2004), votes gain business value. Votes are not just the expression of people's will, but they amount to the success of a business as a whole. I pay close attention to the different scales at which votes are negotiated – chiefly mass-market environments and small-scale transactions -- to understand the kinds of political transactions that give shape to fragmented experiences of liberal democracy. In doing so, I look at how the introduction of marketing and market research into liberal politics lends itself to reproducing historically deep forms of segregation. In this way, I argue that the disruptive late-liberal political processes that many countries around the world underwent in a very short period of time were appropriated and “stabilized” in Colombia by reproducing familiar hierarchical social structures that resulted in the moral hierarchization of political transactions. Small-scale

transactions are often associated with pre-modern political cultures and are framed as detrimental to democracy, while mass-market and image-based politics is desired as a political ideal. This moralization has obscured problematic dynamics within liberalism itself, mainly the relationship between choice, associated with mass-market environments, and interest, associated with small transactional environments.



Moreno de Caro is seen among elite political cultures as a populist. His target electoral population is low-income urban neighborhoods. For the election of 2010, his advertisement piece was his face printed in the 20.000 pesos bill. This political communication piece ironically hints at the idea of “buying” votes.

Late-liberal reflexive epistemologies have provided the tools for this moralization to occur (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). With the increased rational ordering of society, social and political expertise has been geared to explore and intervene social life as a cluster of interconnected categories that can be isolated and dissected (Touraine 1971). Tools such as market research, which is widely used not just in marketing but in policy design, has emerged as a way to organize, intervene in and reproduce particular social orders by connecting individual affective worlds, cultural milieux and overarching

political logics (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009). All by translating complex realities into simple measurable categories that can be transformed into straightforward messages -- “Just do it,” “Believe,” “I’m lovin it.” Class in Colombia is one of those filters that connect the production of normative organization with individual and collective affective worlds.

As several ethnographic works have shown (Applbaum 2004; Dávila 2001; Mazzarella 2003; Paley 2001), market research seeks to organize groups of people into distinguishable and neat categories that reinforce stereotypes – X or Y group is different because it has a particular trait. For example, advertising for Latinos in the U.S. often highlight family since market research shows that Latinos value family life, an identity that is also consumed by the Latino community. Market research is crucial for feeding this circular logic: I tell you what to consume because you tell me what you consume.

In the realm of liberal politics, the introduction of marketing rationales defines the possibilities for political action by reinforcing stereotypical political cultures. Political marketing rehashes the powerful interlocking of census politics and the “politics of entitlement,” a mathematical version of representation that defines voting segments according to voting numbers, and that guides the politics of representation in the post-WWII Western world (Anderson 1998)¹. Pragmatic political consultants seek to measure trends and behaviors to work with them to their best advantage, as well as to have a thorough understanding of the rules of the political game and the distribution of political

¹ As Anderson explains, the segmentation of the vote according to number of voters was born due to the massive migrations that the U.S and some countries in Europe experienced. Seeking to organize new citizens and new voters, national authorities classified the vote along ethnic lines, and this category served as the organizing category to produce forms of electoral segmentation. Unlike the U.S., Colombia never experienced massive international migration. Rather, inner displacements and successive civil wars over different resources shaped class as a salient ordering principle.

power in order to organize successful political strategies that will win elections. In their practice, political consultants fix and reinforce the dynamics they observe as inescapable and immutable objective realities.

During fieldwork, for example, I observed how the use of Geographic Information Systems were used to map possible voters, socioeconomic condition, and voting polls in order to strategically place political advertisement pieces. Campaigns work with limited budgets restricted by national electoral legislation and every penny has to be spent strategically in order to achieve victory. Usually, billboards were not placed in the poorer areas of the city since, according to research, these voters do not vote mobilized by advertisement but mobilized through close-knit networks of allegiance. In this epistemic operation the terms of political participation were fixated according to class-based notions of political behavior.

In this way, the practice of political marketing provides a unique space to observe how liberalism and liberal political subjectivity mold each other via reflexive technologies such as market research. In short, it provides the locus to observe the actions that produce liberalism, to frame “liberalism as a practice” (Foucault 2010), and also as an individual and collective experience. Political marketing offers the possibility to observe how subjects are made and organized by normative systems that delimit the available subject positions to occupy (Faubion 2011).

Scaling globality

Framing liberalism as a practice entails paying close attention to those who practice liberalism. The industry of political marketing is a locus to observe how specific networks and situated expert practices connect historically deep social structures, subject making and the production of political logics. Specific social networks and their social worlds reproduced in Colombia broader macro-political structures and the different epistemological arrangements that frame political life in the country. Politics dramatically changed with the opening of markets and the transformation of the political system in the late 1980s and early 1990s. New legislations were drafted to make these changes possible. Also, new technologies were introduced to manage politics. And particular social networks were orchestrating and guiding this process. Therefore, understanding the historical construction of class subjectivity that informs particular political sensibilities is crucial in understanding how macro political processes have materialized in specific contexts and how they are experienced.

Throughout the different chapters of this dissertation, different scales are weaved together to look at a ruptural moment in Colombian politics and frame how people appropriate change to reproduce familiar structures. My work is in dialogue with the very rich anthropological literature on globalization that has taken on the enormous challenge to ethnographically observe how global political, economic and epistemic connections are produced within the specific space of everyday practices (Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1997; Hannerz 2004; Ong and Stephen J. Collier 2005; Tsing 2011). I situate my analysis specifically in the “Strategic geography of globalization” (Sassen 2007) that shows how local institutional arrangements are fractured in a multiplicity of local, national and global scales. Sassen’s work calls to follow the different legal and institutional footprints

that these processes leave behind. In this dissertation, I look at particular moments of institutional change that show how broader macro political processes are translated into normative narratives that regulate daily life. I contribute to this analysis by incorporating two other dimensions that are crucial in framing the fluid dialogues of global processes and daily individual lives: the uses of technologies and the affective worlds that emerge in these encounters.

Elections provide a unique timeframe to explore the materiality of democracy and the affective textures that mediate daily encounters with democracy. On the one hand, during elections particular technologies and expert languages are used to mobilize electoral strategies and also to count the votes. Much of the work of elections rather than pondering the reaches of individual liberty in transforming political institutions actually is technical (Coles 2007). Political consultants and electoral monitoring activists alike pay a great deal of attention to the different technologies involved in mobilizing political messages and in the techniques used for counting the votes. These technical conversations articulate and produce situated understandings of democracy. How techniques are created and used offer an opportunity to observe the mutually generative relationship between technology and political cultures.

Elections, on the other hand, are also a time when affect is laced with public emotions. This process occurs at two levels. The first level is the emotional work that political consultants and political managers do to stir voters' choice. In alluring the *voto de opinión*, political consultants seek to translate affective worlds into public messages that strike a chord and make voters go to the polls. Political managers in administering the *voto amarrado* seek to capitalize on enrooted sentiments of allegiance and loyalty that

knit political groups together. At this level, emotion is meant to “set people in motion” (Marcus 2002), as the etymology of the word indicates, thus intertwining with rational calculations in the achievement of political goals (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001b; Zaloom 2009). Here, emotions are namable and distinct. They are articulated to discursive practices that are meant to do different things in the world, to achieve different political goals. Political consultants, in their calculations, pair up such distinct emotions as indignation, anger, or hope with specific political outcomes. In this way, at this level of management, emotions appear as “researchable,” measurable, typified and also reproducible to accomplish a political goal in mind.

The second level is the level of affect, the world of the shadows and in “between-ness” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010), that political practitioners dwell in as human beings. At this level, affect is not definable but experienced in “intensities” that affect the body (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). These intensities connect possibilities of being and yield a narrative of messiness and intertwinement of contrary emotions. During elections, desire, pleasure and anxiety are part of the daily lives of those who work within politics. Political consultants deal with politicians’ moods and mental states as they try to strip their practice from any emotion in order not to get clouded by it. And electoral activists interweave hopes and fears about democracy and the future in their own technical practice.

In this way, this dissertation approaches elections as a peephole to look at how emotional languages are produced, mobilized and experienced in public culture, and to observe the mutually generative relations among affective worlds, technologies and macro-political structures.

Why Colombia?

As a Colombian anthropologist, I have many times being confronted by the question “Why Colombia?” to situate my work. We Colombians have a tendency to consider Colombia unique in the world, and often this view is reinforced in predominant ethnographic works (Taussig 1986; Taussig 2005; Sanford 2004): the most brutal yet charming, the most violent yet beautiful. Magical realism, the national literary genre, has helped to create a sense that whatever happens in Colombia is almost magical and out of this world. This narrative style, which at some point vindicated political Latin American claims against an euro-centered narrative of progress, has been slowly appropriated as a form of self-exoticization to gain a distinct place in an international order of multiculturalism where difference is key in accessing resources (Fuguet 2001). I identify with literary avant-gardes in the country that have explored noir genres to re-inscribe Colombia into world flows and that have reacted against the exoticizing view that magical realism brings onto daily life. These works tell stories that are not out of the ordinary but that can happen in any city in the world. In these stories, what happens in Colombia becomes part of a broader web of events that interlink places, characters and dynamics. I relate to this sensibility, and accordingly I situate my work in Colombia with the intention to tell a story that happens in many other places of the world.

Colombia, as many other countries in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia, was part of a “wave of democratization,” to borrow Samuel Huntington’s (1991) term, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund designed political and economic guidelines to prepare these countries for democracy, which were adopted in newly designed political constitutions and economic systems. New electoral and political systems were introduced and novel forms of electoral politics started to arise. American political consultants, who by the late 1970s and early 1980s found a saturated market back home, started to export their expertise to these contexts where a plethora of political options had been opened and where mass media were expanding (Johnson 2009). Colombia is another setting where this global trend took place and where one can empirically observe how post cold war geo-political orderings interweaved with the spread of liberal political subjectivity.

In this sense, the picture is not complete when looking solely at macrostructures. There are some particularities about Colombia that contribute to outlining a richer narrative of late-liberal politics. The first aspect is the institutionalized pyramidal social structure in spite of the participatory reforms. Colombia drafted a new political constitution in 1991 that sponsored participatory democracy in an attempt to make a more egalitarian society and end the long-standing cycles of violence that have scarred the country's national history. The hope was to make the political and legal system more accessible to the population. This promise was partially fulfilled. Although there are certain political and legal tools that are widely used, accessing certain resources and services is reserved to the privileged. Public services are "stratified," meaning that there is a rank from one to six to classify the population. One is the poorest and six is the wealthiest on this scale, which orders land tenure, taxes and how public services are charged. This "strata" language is commonly used in daily speech as well as to mark where one belongs. Someone belonging to stratum six is conceived to inhabit a different

planet than someone from stratum one. The physical space where citizens work, live and play, the recreational activities, education and health services vary dramatically if one is placed in either extremes of the scale. Most likely, stratum one workers will be the employees to stratum six bosses. And this power differential has not been bridged nor was even addressed with the reformation of the constitution. Rather, with the increased privatization of public services, this fragmentation was further reinforced.

As scholars of Latin America have explored, post reform constitutions are an odd mix of progressive social and political rights and conservative economic systems (Caldeira and Holston 1999; Dezalay and Garth 2002; Holston 2008; Lemaitre 2009). Social rights were granted while neoliberal economies that favored wealthier portions of the population were set in place. In Colombia, for instance, at the same time that direct democracy mechanisms were implemented (such as public consultation, referenda, *tutela*²), the social security system was privatized via a legislative act known as Ley 100 (1993). This schism between the rights granted by law and the hindrance that the institutional arrangements pose to effectively realize these rights has sponsored a highly strategic political system – attuned with what other scholars have observed in contexts where state services are hard to access, by means of privatization or messy bureaucratic administration (Chatterjee 2006; Humphrey 2002; Ledeneva 1998; Muehlebach 2011). Populations that cannot access certain services, because they cannot pay for them, access them by making strategic connections in the political arena. Elections, when politicians are desperately seeking votes, are instrumental for this new guise of the liberal negotiation of interest to arise.

² Tutela was one of the main developments in participatory politics. This figure allows any citizen to file a complaint to the Constitutional Court if their constitutional rights are being violated. This instrument is among the most cherished democratic tools among the Colombian public.

In this landscape, novel forms of political properness and political morality have been reproduced in political culture attuned to the lofty ideals of a participatory democracy but reproducing socially hierarchical forms of distinction. The networks of allegiance and loyalty that often support strategic politics, the so-called clientelistic networks, have been many times diagnosed as the malaise that hinders participatory political systems from thriving, and are commonly mapped onto urban poor and rural communities (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). Recent critiques of the literature available on clientelism question the assumptions that this phenomenon is a remnant of pre-modern, corrupt political cultures. Rather, various works propose understanding clientelism as networks of solidarity and problem solving (Auyero 2000; Roudakova 2008; Schiller 2011) and thus a visible locus for the liberal principles of negotiation of political interest (Habermas 1989), in a late liberal political moment where State-making is a complicated entanglement of private corporations, communities, bureaucracies, international organizations, marketing and mass-communication practices (Westbrook 2004). I contribute to this line of analysis by framing how a class specific view of clientelism migrated in the world of policy-making and politics, a world that in Colombia is intimately entrenched with academia (Rivas 2007), to produce a hegemonic public morality that overlaps political ideals, political behavior and hierarchical notions of class. These threads of class, political subjectivity and institutional change that run through the different chapters of this work hope to contribute to recent scholarly works that have stepped away from multiculturalism as a framing category for late-liberal politics and have called attention to class as a production site of contemporary global liberalism (Cahn 2008).

The pragmatics of hope

An American pragmatic approach to politics informs much of the political work done in Colombia today. The need for research, of understanding socioeconomic and cultural contexts for designing successful campaign strategies is rooted in the presupposition that reality is consensually built (Festenstein 1997). This kind of research, as political consultants believe, helps them access, intervene in and stir the transformation of these particular realities they study. As Applbaum (2004:68) writes about the marketing industry, “[t]he proper level at which to observe marketing impulse and agency, therefore, is at the level of landscape: marketers seek to determine the dimensions of the natural world within which exchange is to take place, and to alter the way people know and experience exchange and consumption.” In this sense, this dissertation, more than being a study of Machiavellian political pragmatics, focuses on world-making pragmatics, those practices that grab elements from here and there to build possible worlds to come (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

In electoral politics, the construction of political worlds is always in the making, and is anchored in a temporality that looks to the future. Every election brings with it the promise of a different reality, of the realization of utopia. And behind those promises of Change or Hope are teams of researchers and political consultants who are intervening the present in particular ways to project it to the future. Specifically, the actions of political practitioners of all stripes have consequences in building the present and how democracy is experienced.

This pragmatics of hope is explored in five chapters. The first chapter discusses the methodological advantages of ethnographic research during elections to situate democracy in the context of the particular practices, technologies and materials through which it is realized. This methodological approach based on understanding democracy as an object produced in specific ecologies opens an analytical door to escape universalist ideological presumptions that end up stripping democracy and the concept of “the political” from its analytical force. Thereafter, I look at the ambiguous affective worlds that I inhabited during fieldwork and how this positioning analytically frames and delimits the category of the political.

This initial methodological reflection is followed by a historic overview on how the categories *voto de opinión* and *voto amarrado*, which frame political action and organize political participation in Colombia came into being. For this purpose, in the second chapter, I look at the political and economic reforms set in motion in the 1990s, as well as the student leaders and elite groups who fought for these reforms. I trace how historically constructed class-based notions about political properness and civility were mobilized to make sense of the reforms by organizing and coding a fragmented political subjectivity as a problem of class and civility. In this discussion, I look at how political elites organize participatory politics by delimiting proper and improper forms of participation, thus reproducing hierarchical social structures while retaining a desired progressive and modern participatory political framework.

In the third chapter, I discuss clientelism and media-centered political administration as the expression of liberalism in different market scales. I therefore trace the specific scales where market ideologies and liberal politics intertwine, and the

different logics that inform the administration of political life at these different scales. I focus on the constitution and organization of political forms of expertise to manage mass-market environments and small-scale environments of political transaction. For this purpose, I describe the introduction of an American inspired form of political management centered on techno-scientific knowledge geared to administer public opinion to Colombian politics, while traditional ways of electoral administration, mainly a model based on the negotiation of political interest, was kept in place. In order to reconcile these competing forms of expertise, a discourse on political pragmatism with class-based moral undertones has been mobilized to organize fractured forms of electoral and political administration in segmented socioeconomic political environments.

The analysis of the political epistemologies that inform political practice in Colombia is followed by an ethnographic exploration of how these different forms of expertise produce separate political worlds. In the fourth chapter, structured in two sections, I analyze how the communication practices geared to administer the two kinds of votes and the means used to mobilize these messages compose different worlds where participation looks different. In the first part of the chapter, I focus on the technologies and media used to produce a national, synchronous electoral conversation that intertwines with personal affective worlds where bourgeois liberal notions about collective and individual freedom are produced. In the second part, I continue to look at privatized forms of communication produced in clientelistic networks, like gossip, word-of-mouth and political gatherings, which reinforce loyalty, intimacy and proximity as a legitimate form of political administration.

In the last chapter, I return to look at the work of the leaders of the student movement who pushed for the political reforms of the early 1990s to find them in the setting of a citizen-based electoral monitoring NGO. I specifically focus on the work of Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE) whose executive director and lead researcher were two of the visible leaders of the student movement. By looking at the electoral monitoring practices, the statistical language that this group uses, and the international partnerships that they have built over years of work, I analyze how MOE's work legitimates state institutions and civic action. I frame their use of statistical narratives as a language of hope that materializes a desire for a democracy to come in the present, by negotiating individual agency in the midst of overpowering power structures, and displacing it a future yet to come.

Notes on the uses of terms:

Throughout the dissertation, I use different terms that I wish to clarify for an easier read on this work. I use the term *political practitioner* to include anybody who works within politics and, in that sense, practices politics. Hence, the term applies to campaigning experts, political consultants, politicians and political activists who work in electoral politics alike.

I follow the use of the term *political consultant* in Colombia, which includes campaigning media consultants and political strategists alike. In practical terms, these are different although they work in association. The political strategist designs and directs the overall campaign strategy, while media consultants focus on particular media aspects of the designed strategy. These media consultants and campaign strategists work in association with pollsters, who often bring technical insights to the campaigns.

Political managers are in charge of managing the campaign on the ground, mainly working with *local political leaders* in order to mobilize votes. These *political managers* act as the community liaison between the candidate and the voting constituency. The *local political leaders* are recognized people in their communities who work in direct link with the *political manager*. I prefer not to use the terms *political broker* or *middleman* to refer to these positions since these terms entail unidirectional forms of power. The question that always pops to my head when I see these terms is “middle of where”? In fact the distribution of power is more complex within electoral organizations and it is hard to spot who is in the middle, holding it all together.

Chapter 1

Dissecting Elections

Elections are a period to take a peek into how political cultures are produced. During elections, collective hopes and fears, ideas about the nation, ideas about political correctness, corruption and political virtue are mobilized in public discourse to stir public emotions and therefore allure citizens to vote. Media, social media, private conversations, public transportation, the streets and virtually any space where sociality unfolds become an environment in which the political competition takes place, disrupting these environments' regular flows, but also acting as a magnifying glass to observe what these flows are about. Elections are a hyperbole of "normal" life marked by a distinct temporality in which political cultures become tangible.

This sense of distinctiveness of elections is granted by the aim of elections in itself: for the people, the "demos," to show its power by choosing how it will be governed until a new election comes around. In other words, elections are a timeframe in which democracy becomes tangible. In this timeframe, the object of democracy, the power of the people, becomes alive and is experienced as real, as citizens take part in the making of government and in how democracy is built. However, this process is messy. And during elections it is possible to observe how "the people" and their participation in government is not a unified, monolithic category. Rather, elections offer an ethnographic opportunity to dissect the plurality of meanings that "the people" participating in politics

take and understand how this category is produced and mobilized in creating particular political cultures.

In this chapter, I look at the theoretical and methodological implications of doing fieldwork during elections. I first outline why elections offer an ideal space to produce situated understandings of what is political action and democracy, and why this “situatedness” is critical in delimiting our political objects for ethnographic study. I argue that elections open a window to understand the materiality of democracy, the particular technologies, practices and materials that mobilize particular notions of democracy. I find this route fruitful to escape the analytical traps that performative approaches to elections pose, mainly, the ubiquity of the category of the political, which has diminished its analytical force.

In the second part, I reflect on the several moments of ambiguity and the ambiguous relationships I encountered working with my informants. I do not mean to offer this reflection to illustrate the complicated ethical negotiations that anthropologists face in the field, many lucid works have been produced with this preoccupation in mind (Jane Fishburne Collier and Yanagisako 1990; Faubion and Marcus 2009; Fischer 2003; Scheper-Hughes 2001). Neither do I seek to use the dissertation as a confessional medium to heal or justify my own experience. I wish to move beyond a cyclical self-reflexivity that dead-ends in the anecdote. I rather look at ambiguity as a positioning in the field that speaks about the ethnographic object at hand.

Following Faubion (2009), I am riding a “new wave of objectivism” that reasserts that Anthropology has something to say about the world beyond the ethnographer, but that takes interpretation as a serious enterprise. This new objectivism is sensitive to the

fact that objects interact with their multi-scalar contexts, are named, shaped and brought to life by situated ways of knowing and are observed by people with particular affective and moral sensibilities. Doing fieldwork in Colombia during elections was like looking at one's own image in a fun house mirror. Even though my fieldwork was in my "native" country, among some expert elites that I had access to through my social circle, and therefore there was some degree of familiarity, the image that I saw was an unfamiliar, distorted version of familiar traits. The hyperbolic times of elections served as some sort of ironic distance to observe flows and dynamics in a different light.

All roads lead to Rome?

During the presidential and congressional elections of 2010, I spent my days as the coordinator for the international observation missions for the Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE)—a civil society NGO for electoral monitoring—and as a very active participant observer, almost a confidant, of a political strategy firm in Colombia. I began my days overseeing democracy, fighting for electoral transparency and against any form of electoral fraud. I ended my days listening to stories about the pragmatics of political campaigning in a country whose political culture is still intimately tied to clientelism and patronage, and where drug traffickers and illegal armed groups exercise a powerful influence over the electoral process. I had breakfast contemplating the reaches of participatory democracy, and I had dinner feeling the weight, rigidity and stagnancy of Colombia's political history. I was caught up in between two mutually constitutive and reproducing outlooks on politics, with distinctive ethical implications, that could not be

disaggregated. I oscillated between the hopeful promises of a participatory democracy designed in the 1991 political constitution, and the pragmatic need to navigate, and therefore reproduce, rigid structures of power in order to manage politics. Everyday I observed how the promise of political participation and authoritative political cultures destroyed and rebuilt each other, just as in a Greek myth.

I felt torn. But, more than my personal feeling informed by my own positioning in the field, I was before what extensive scholarly work has diagnosed as a late-liberal cultural logic of fracture (Jameson 1991; Ong 2004; Ong and Stephen J. Collier 2005). Like my informants, I navigated a landscape of political “pastiche” where multiple political rationales and diverse, sometimes contradictory, ethical engagements with politics and democracy were assembled together (Fischer 2003; Faubion 2011). Different international and national civic organizations, national political parties, national and international political consultants, politicians, media sources and national regulatory entities took part in the making elections and democracy.

The period of elections offers a window to take a look at how democracy is made, not in a figurative way but in a literal one. As Don Handelman (1998:7) points out, studying public events provide an opportunity to identify “the logics of their design, themselves embedded in cultural matrices that imbue these designs with significance and that put them to work in cultural ways.” In other words, studying the production and unfolding of public events sheds light on how social and political order is produced, and what are the rationales informing these forms of organization. By analyzing elections, the observer is able to dissect the particular forms power takes, and the media that mobilizes

it, in producing and reproducing a particular system, or in systems breaking down to become something else.

Handelman's approach offers the possibility to study the particular technologies and materials at work in the construction of democracy. Anthropology has a long-standing tradition in analyzing the function of events in the reproduction of systems. Rituals, festivals, ceremonies, carnivals have been the object of countless ethnographic work. This line of ethnographic inquiry has paid close attention to the symbolic dimensions of public events (Geertz 1973), thus highlighting the performance and repetition of roles as a metaphor of the broader social system from which they emerge. In this way, elections have often being conceived as "social dramas" (Turner 1988) where the ritualized performance of social roles evince and help negotiate conflict and power struggles (Bowie 2008; Nimmo 1985). For instance, across elections in different parts of the world it is common to find similar political and public figures such as the underdog, the patron, the eccentric, or the satirist negotiating their positions in similar ways. These observations may indicate that politics behaves in the same way in spite of cultural differences; after all it is about human nature. But, politics do different things in particular contexts, and this variability is also analytically relevant. By shifting attention to the "design" of public events, Handelman steps away from the performative dimensions of events and opens the possibility of observing the "making" of public rituals, as another entry point to understand how order is produced and what it does in particular contexts³.

³ Kimberley Coles (2004) has critiqued a ritual-oriented approach to elections for obscuring the production of knowledge and authority at work in the assemblage of electoral instruments. The literature on ritual is quite extensive and offers different routes to approach this question that are not contrary to ANT sensibilities. The problem is not ritual, but performative approaches to ritual that do not take into account

This approach has been fruitful to frame the sense of fracture and stagnation that I found myself in while studying the congressional and presidential elections of 2010 in Colombia. The multiple networks I was immersed in -- their different agendas and multiple ways of feeling and understanding politics -- produced radically different versions of democracy. While some networks attuned with international standards of transparency and best democratic practices highlighted the role of participation and free information in building a healthy democracy, other networks more attuned with Machiavellian political pragmatism stressed the strategic mobilization of political resources (media, networks, political conditions) in the making of democratic political dynamics. Depending on where I was situated, democracy looked either like virtue or like a strategic game. All of these networks moved within a widespread sense that Colombian politics is stagnant and never changes. I found myself in between different versions of political competition that saw politics having the same result, no matter what actions were taken, and how different these actions were. Analytically, I was trapped between multiple and contrary discourses and practices and predictable outcomes. How could all roads, if so different, lead to Rome?

Studying elections ethnographically as a site where democracy and politics are designed provided a way out of this analytical maze. As Kimberley Coles (2007:32) conveys in her analysis of electoral monitoring in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

the interaction of citizens, things and forms of expertise. In this way, I also find a problem in just seeing elections as technologies where knowledge and authority is produced. This approach obscures the production of affect at work in how citizens approach these democratic instruments or how particular expert networks mobilize affect to “do” particular things in the world. An approach that focuses on the “logics of the design” of the ritual elucidates the intentionality of the set-up of elections, the expectations this intentionality generates and the ways in which expert networks and citizens interact with the production of this order.

Analyzing the techniques of electoral and democratic government demonstrates that much of the work done is epistemological. The seemingly unimportant notes attached to the registration forms matter--a lot. Complex interpretive and technical tasks articulate democratic governance and its possibilities.

This call to study the epistemological operations articulated in the design of elections situate seemingly universal practices in particular contexts, therefore showing how these practices are being appropriated within particular historical structures that produce specific political cultures. Moreover, by situating political practices within specific networks it is possible to observe the ways in which “universals” travel and get reinforced as such. Although Coles’ work deals with electoral monitoring, her emphasis on probing electoral techniques is relevant to frame the work of other networks that make elections happen, such as political managers, political consultants and political strategists.

The work of electoral observers, political consultants, political managers and politicians has a material dimension that is crucial in situating democracy and drawing boundaries around the objects of ethnographic study within politics. In a recent article, Matei Candea (2011), following Joan Vincent’s appreciation on political anthropology, notes that by being suspicious of rigid and ethnocentric definitions of what is politics and what is not, anthropology has pushed politics to every topic the discipline deals with. The discipline has seen an explosion of works dealing with the “politics of _____” (plug in your interest), which has left the category of “the political” relatively untreated. As anthropologists, we are skeptical of offering any definitions, but this skepticism has rendered the political as some sort of mystical affair that is possible to recognize when seen, but that is too great and diffuse to define.

Adding to Candea's point, public and widespread circulated notions of politics that anthropologist encounter in fieldwork also contribute to the ineffability of the political. Those people who work within politics or who offer commentary about politics often treat the inner dynamics of electoral competition as a matter of "human nature." They reify a sense that politics has been and always will be politics after all, in spite of the setting it is situated in, in the work they produced. During my fieldwork in Colombia I found this analytical trap that was constantly reinforced by political practitioners and by opinion makers alike.

Daniel Samper Ospina, a renowned Colombian political satirist, appeals to an intuitive public sense about politics as immutable in order to connect with his audience. His weekly columns are a written cartoon of Colombia's politicians and political customs. He draws on daily life topics to convey a sense of irony that his readers can connect to, by linking stereotypes, a sense of eternal repetition in politics and the grotesque:

[Referring to a political scandal] This scandal is about the eternal problem of land tenure in Colombia, the same pettiness of the governing class, the same corruption, the same impossibility [of changing things]. Who doesn't draw a huge nose to Juan Lozano [local politician who has this salient physical feature] in a hyperrealist painting? I try to make a correlation between both things [physical features and political behaviors]: between obesity and corruption, for instance. Between ugliness and dirty political behavior, like in the case of Valencia Cossio, for example. (...) The simple humanization of all of these characters, the fact that people feel they are within reach, it makes them vulnerable. It's a very emotional way of making them vulnerable.

Samper Ospina in making his written cartoons appeals to affectivity towards politics that anybody can connect to and that appeals to an understanding that certain political

behaviors are an expression of human traits. Like Samper Ospina, in order to mobilize people in political ways, political consultants and political managers also appeal to this “raw” and intuitive understanding of politics. Camilo Rojas, a well-known Colombian political strategist, described his work as understanding human nature. Besides the modern techniques he used for gaining insight about political behaviors, like focus groups and polling, Greek mythology was also a source to gain insights on modern politics. The attributes of the Gods and their power struggles provided a reflection on what core human actions and human sociality are all about. This widely spread definition of the political that locates it within the definition of humanity itself rendered it almost impenetrable. I was before the Minotaur’s maze.

But, as Argentinean poet Leopoldo Marechal writes, “the only way out of a labyrinth is from above.” Candea offers a methodological route to look up and exit analytical entrapments of the political that relegate it to totalizing and ethnocentric definitions, or as equivalent to human nature, and therefore present in every human action. Candea argues for introducing the distinctions of what constitutes political action in relation to the context where these actions come from, as a way to ethnographically redraw analytical boundaries. Looking at the design of elections, the materials and technologies used to mobilize certain messages and political actions, how these messages and actions are crafted and conceived, and how the environments for political action are organized show how politics is set in motion. Electoral competition season provides a perfect setting to look at the materials that mobilize politics and democracy as a way to escape the mazes built by exclusively situating the analysis in the performances of subjects and informants.

Making environments in democracy

In recent years, materials, networks and objects have gained increasing attention in political theory (Latour and Weibel 2005; Braun and Whatmore 2010; Bennett 2010). Recent works have focused on how resources, technology and government are mutually constitutive, like the importance of oil (Mitchell 2011) or metallurgy in shaping governance (Barry 2010). These works pay special attention to the epistemological operations that inform how things and people are governed. In this sense, these works have sought to break down Aristotelian hierarchies that decouple materiality from immateriality, and that produce very distinct spaces for humans and things (Stengers 2010). Recent scholarship has reframed these distinctions and has rather focused on the generative flows that both make things and people, and to the kinds of relations that people and things have. However, as Ingold (2007) points out, this processual approach is not a form of contemporary animism that sees life or “agency” in objects but rather sees how things are part of life. Ingold then calls to look at “environments” where objects “are not objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced” (Ingold 2007:14).

The design of environments for electoral purposes, how these environments are organized, and the objects that compose these environments tells a larger story about how cultural specificities ground, code and compose such broad ideas as power, liberty, participation and democracy. The creation of particular emotional environments is a goal in political management in order to effectively deliver a particular message, create bonds

of allegiance and set people in motion for a particular political goal. In more market-oriented polities, these spaces appeal to individual emotion (Brader 2006), in more transactional liberal polities these spaces appeal to a sense of indebtedness and loyalty to a group (Auyero 2000). How these environments are crafted tells a story about how specific political cultures imagine political action to be; for instance, do the voting polls represent individual will and choice or are they an instrument to achieve collective well-being?

This question of what environments are supposed to do for people and the objects used to organize these environments are among the main concerns of this dissertation. The ways these spaces are designed and the experiences that citizens have with these spaces are a point of entry to probe the encounters of normative ideas about politics with political practice, and the political cultures these spaces are producing. This methodological concern has been a way to find a different angle to reified notions about Latin American political culture. As Auyero (2000) explains, political science scholars and local Latin American elites have often associated clientelism to rural and poor areas, linking the concept to some sort of political pre-modernity, an antithesis of the liberal state (an experience very close to the study of Mediterranean political cultures where patronage has been similarly treated). This treatment of clientelism and patronage has overseen how these political formations tell compelling stories about how citizens are encountering the state, in a time where state functions have been privatized and when the state has been blurred. By focusing on how the environments of electoral politics are organized and what they are meaning to organize, I step away from ethnocentric and

class-centric normative notions of political purity and rather turn my eyes to see how these norms are produced and how they organize political practice.

Market segmentation, for example, is one of these organizing principles of elections. Colombia imported the industry of political management from the U.S. in the early 1990s. With it, a principle of market segmentation was introduced in the administration of political life. Market segmentation entails organizing populations according to selected criteria, and figuring out what those groups are more likely to consume. For this purpose, surveys and focus groups are paired up with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and ethnographic fieldwork to appropriately design successful sales strategies. With the marketization of politics around the world (Fritz Plasser 2009), these technologies have increasingly been used in the belief that as a product of market research, these technologies will reach voters more efficiently. However, this widespread global practice of politics is also culturally nuanced. The criteria selected to organize populations in different parts of the world vary, often revealing the sensitive topics that strike a chord in particular political environments.

In Colombia, a historically highly exclusionary and highly hierarchical country, the main organizing criterion is socioeconomic class. Electoral politics is divided into those activities catering to middle and upper-middle class populations, and tactics specially geared to lure the poor, as will be explored in the following chapters. This is not the case for instance in the U.S., where race and racism are historically contentious issues, and therefore race and ethnicity are more salient criteria than socioeconomic class in organizing markets and producing social order (although class has made a comeback specially after the 99% movement). Rather than the middle-class or the working-class

vote in general, political analysts and political consultants seek to understand how middle-class “Latinos,” or the middle-class “white,” or middle-class “African Americans,” or middle-class “Asians” behave.

In this way, the organizing categories to segment markets, as well as the techniques, tactics, and instruments used to appeal to the different market segments reveal historically constructed fields of contention that politics is supposed to sort out. The epistemological operations contained in forms of expertise elucidate cultural anxieties and hopes about what politics and democracies are supposed to achieve and how they are organized. In the course of fieldwork, I observed how these categories were produced in very ambiguous terrains. By working among these expert networks, by building relationships of trust and negotiating ethical viewpoints about politics, I could delve deep into these pools of ambiguity, which also informed the relations I was establishing. But, as will be seen in the next section, working in ambiguous terrains is not a disadvantage or an analytical hindrance. Rather, ambiguity is a place for reflexivity where we can learn very much about how we are positioned within our fieldwork and about our objects of study.

The politics of ambiguity: Doing fieldwork among political experts

But, it being my intention to write a thing which shall be useful to him who apprehends it, it appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of a matter than the imagination of it; for many have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been known or seen, because how one lives is so far distant from how one ought to live, that he who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil. Hence it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity.

(The Prince, Machiavelli)

Machiavelli saw ethics as a radical separating line between the world of politics and the world of daily life. For him, the decisions that a Prince had to make could not follow pedestrian or religious understandings of virtue or evil that sees them as clearly distinct realms. In politics, rulers have to always favor their people and this imperative often leads political leaders down uneasy and winding roads. As Sir Isaiah Berlin (1990) later iterated in his essay *The One and the Many*, the realization of liberty, and therefore choice, in plural contexts where there is not a cohesive agreement on virtues brings the very idea of absolute virtue into question. Decision makers often face cumbersome situations where choosing the lesser evil, what will do less harm, becomes the right choice even though is not the 'good' choice.

To this day, this notion of political pragmatism informs the work of those who work within politics and therefore defines what politics is. And this understanding makes politics ambiguous. Political strategists and political managers in Colombia work under the axioms of contemporary political management, stirring the given conditions to achieve a goal, in a country where the given conditions involve illegal militias and drug trafficking. These grey areas often look very grim, and as a Colombian interested in politics doing fieldwork in Colombia, the frictions I had with some of my informants were many. As other anthropologists who have done their fieldwork in contexts where moral conflicts arose (Holmes 2000), I found myself caught in areas where discomfort and friendship entangled in intimate and uncomfortable ways.

I became a good friend of Nicolás, one of the several political strategists that I interviewed during fieldwork. I disagreed with his methods and with his ways of looking

at politics. He justified working with very shady figures in Colombian politics, by saying that politics was a business and a distinct field where daily life morality was not applicable. This pragmatic take on politics made him a savvy politician. He was the person to go to in order to know what was really happening behind the latest scandal, to the point that several journalists from different media sought him as a reliable source. He knew how to handle those relations strategically. He knew when to give out information, and he knew when to withhold it. Information in his business is a strategic asset that can bring a campaign down or boost it up. In this way, Nicolás was an expert in aligning resources and in knowing how the relationships he kept could be potential resources for his political aims. He knew how to handle iffy political relationships without crossing the boundaries of legality, but certainly moving in ethically uneasy areas. He would access information that very few people could access by knowing the right people, even if the right people were publicly perceived as corrupt, and in some cases, were people who had pending judicial affairs.

We met on a weekday for lunch with a journalist who was looking for some reliable information to write a story. Nicolás made us laugh with his very blatant remarks about politics. The journalist wanted to know more about Nicolás' relations with a politician who had been recently involved in a corruption scandal. Nicolás, turned around and humorously answered "As an old politician used to say, I will tell you when the statute of limitations expires." In the format of a joke, he leavened what could have been a tense situation, a line of questioning seeking a confession. The irony of the joke, the gap that it opened between truth and fiction, between earnestness and doubt, played with the very grey areas that those who work in politics sometimes face. The journalist taking

part in the joke asked him “How can you sleep at night?” in between chuckles. I jumped into the joke and answered for him “he’s Dr. Evil” (like the character of the Austin Powers saga). We all jumped into the joke, into an area of double-entendres, holding our cards close to our chest behind the protecting shield of irony and humor.

But, humor, irony and jokes became more than a shield. Sharing a laugh about even tragic situations, built my relationship of trust with Nicolás, as it did with many of the people I worked during fieldwork. As Vladdo, one of the main political cartoonists in Colombia told me once, “I laugh to keep from crying.” And many of the people that I encountered during fieldwork coped with the sense of stagnancy, rigidity and indecency of Colombian politics by laughing at it. Joking provides a way to deal with ambiguity and the contradictions that rigid political structures carry along, mainly the highly formal discourse of properness that politicians appeal to, and the dramatic realities of violence and corruption that blatantly contradict those discourses. In this way, joking is a form to negotiate how one is positioned in a field that is never what it seems to be, a field populated by grey areas and loops. And, therefore, joking contains the possibility of reflexivity, the possibility of encountering those we might find morally reprehensible in a different light and understanding where they come from, to the point of building heartfelt friendships.

But, joking also hints at the ambiguity of the political field in another way; it complicates notions about what being a political expert means. As will be explored in following chapters, the industry of political management is cemented in a rationality of calculability, which presupposes predicting and managing human emotions and steering choice. The development and correction of objective market research tools, such as polls,

surveys, and focus groups, seek to be able to predict how the electorate will behave and inform the design of campaign strategies. This form of expertise plays with the idea that there is an objective knowledge about the irrationality of human emotions, and therefore human emotions can be stirred in a calculated way. But, as Boyer (2008) points out, one of the traps that the anthropology of experts and expertise has fallen into is reifying the belief that experts are what they do, and therefore are often depicted as rational beings stripped from any emotion. In fact, as Boyer explains, often experts dwell in the very ambiguous space of affect, where the production expertise, epistemological operations, is intertwined with anxiety and desire. Cracking a joke about one's own expertise or about the political field, plays with the pretensions of objective know-how about human emotions that political practitioners brag about, and the constant struggle to strip one from any emotion towards politics in order to effectively manage politics, to have a balanced view.

In the many lunch meetings I had with Camilo Rojas, a well-renowned political strategist and professor of Political Ideas who generously showed me the ropes of his practice, the stories about campaigning, political communication and power struggles in Colombia intertwined with lessons in history and political philosophy. The story of Caterina Sforza, duchess of Fiorli, was a favorite to illustrate what Camilo described as strategic thought in politics, characterized by the dispassionate management of political conditions to one's own favor. Caterina Sforza lived in a time of political turmoil, when the Borgia family, as head of the Vatican, attempted to consolidate their power. Her life unfolded between battles, looting and fortresses. A famous episode of her life came when the rival family Orsis murdered her husband Girolamo; Sforza and her children were held

hostage. Sforza managed to escape by offering her services as mediator between the Orsis and a neighboring city that would not surrender to their power. She left her children behind as proof of her good intentions. However, once out, the legend tells that she threatened the Orsis with revenge. The Orsis threatened to kill her children who were still under their control. In response, Sforza exposed her genitals and yelled: “Go ahead, I have the means to make more.” Her uncle came in her aid and with his help Sforza regained control over Fiorli. Caterina Sforza’s story summarizes what a good strategist is supposed to do: tame one’s own affects in order to better calculate and evaluate the political conditions given. Camilo always highlighted Sforza’s detachment, even from her motherly instincts, as a proof what a savvy State person is supposed to act like, what a keen political strategist should be like. The defeat of one’s own passionate nature is the first quality that a good politician should have. A clear judgment guided by reason rather than by emotion is what any student of politics should strive for.

This quest to self-dehumanization in order to enhance political abilities is anchored in western political thought, which has posited an absolute divide between emotions as belonging to the private, individual realm and rationality as the ground that builds public life. However, political practitioners are human after all and their practices elicit the fluid relations that emotionality and rationality hold (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). Politicians, political managers, and the different people I interviewed during fieldwork who worked within the political field talked about politics in very intimate and emotional terms. Their live histories, their personal memories and the feelings they had about specific political situations mediated the narratives they put together about their

work. Moreover, these very intimate narratives also mediated my understanding of elections.

Experts working within the development of political campaigns highlighted how emotional campaigns are for all those who are involved, not just for the people who follow them. Without exception the politicians and political consultants that I interviewed highlighted the “adrenaline rush” that they get from working in political campaigns. As a political strategist said, “winning a political campaign is one of the most exciting experiences in life.” But, this “rush” comes intertwined with feelings of crisis and anxiety. Sometimes campaigns stall, and it is not due to the objective conditions of their development but due to the state of mind of those who are working in it, starting by the politician.

Nicolás, for instance, sought to put this alluvium of affectivity to work for his own purposes. In a visit to his office, he was looking for a graffiti artist. His idea was to put up graffiti against the candidate of the opposing campaign. The graffiti were not meant to stir the voters’ perceptions about the opposing candidate. Rather, he placed them near the opposing candidate’s house for that person to see. He knew how vain the opposing candidate was and how upset the candidate would be by seeing this comments painted on walls. With this maneuver, Nicolás attempted to win some time for his own campaign, he knew that this action would generate a negative emotional response from the opposing candidate that would be a hiccup in that campaign.

In a moment where the state function has been increasingly blurred by private interests administrating public life, the divide between public and private (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990), between rationality and emotionality (Gal 2002; Fraser 1990; Warner

2002), on individual and collective (Reddy 1999) are not obvious. The industry of political management is one of these places where public and private intertwine, where there is a strategic use of emotions in coordinating and achieving a goal, as scholars working on new social movements have also diagnosed (Hirschkind 2001). These new settings evince the dialectical relation that emotions and rationality hold. And this relation cannot be disaggregated or mapped into distinct, separate spheres of human existence like public and private. Rather, these emergent formations invite the social researcher to probe rationality and emotions as reflexive discursive strategies at play in constituting particular ways of being within politics. And elections offer the perfect setting to draw out these objects of ethnographic inquiry where the intimate links between rationality and emotionality can be observed in tangible ways. In the following chapters, I explore the materializations of these links between affectivity and rationality by looking at the work of people who make elections and electoral democracy happen.

Chapter 2

Local Universalisms

Electoral times are hectic and chaotic: massive amounts of information are being produced about the development of the electoral competition and different factions use the means available to pursue and achieve their goals. In Colombia, these practices range from legal communication practices, to shady electoral negotiations that sometimes border illegality, to plainly illegal brutality such as the coercion to vote for favored candidates by armed groups. Elections in Colombia have the whole spectrum. Citizens are constantly being bombarded by information that circulates through established media, through social networks or the gossip that travels in informal networks. Political practitioners of all sorts –political consultants and managers, politicians, campaign teams and democracy activists—take part in the production and circulation of the electoral information. But, they use certain categories that organize, the sometimes convoluted, political reality and that frames the analysis of political behavior. These categories filter the design of any sort of political action and how these actions are read and coded.

I became particularly puzzled by two categories regularly used both in public media and in expert discourse to convey and explicate a sense of living within a fragmented polity: *voto de opinión* [informed voter] and *voto amarrado* [tied vote]. The former category is used to describe middle to upper urban class, educated voters who are mobilized by media messages that articulate both emotions and arguments. The latter category is used to describe poor urban and rural voters organized in clientelistic networks of favor exchange and problem solving who are mobilized by the satisfaction of needs (Auyero 2000; O'Donnell 1998). More than descriptive or indexing categories,

these two forms of understanding and existing within Colombian politics are semiotic fields (Faubion 2011). They are historically and culturally specific ways of inhabiting politics shaped by institutional shifts and sociological configurations of class.

In this chapter, I focus on tracing the particular political and social processes in recent Colombian history that gave birth to these notions. I focus my attention chiefly on the generational sentiments, national events and geopolitical scales at work in the reformulation of the political constitution of 1991—a major defining political event in Colombian politics. First, I start by explaining how James Faubion's (2011) program for an anthropology of ethics provides an appropriate toolkit to understand how political subjectivity is organized in Colombia. I look at how local and hierarchical notions of class, collective desires and global discourses on participatory democracy organize the semiotic field by shaping the available repertoire of possible [political] subject positions (Faubion 2011). Secondly, I look at the reforms introduced in electoral politics and party politics to understand the institutional frameworks that support the divide between a *voto de opinión* and a *voto amarrado*.

Class-ifying voters

The congressional and presidential elections of 2010 were marked by polarization. The candidates, independently from their political affiliation, were mainly divided in those who supported outgoing President Alvaro Uribe, probably the most popular president in Colombian history, and those who were against him. The Presidential race revolved around the public images of Uribe. His successor, Juan Manuel

Santos, was portrayed as the continuation of the successful political pragmatism characteristic of the Uribe era, a style of government associated with authority, security and order. In opposition, Antanas Mockus, Santos's adversary, crafted an image as a symbol of anti-politics, of anti-corruption and of fiscal asceticism; as a symbol of political virtue. Mockus stood as the ethical opposite of Santos, who as Uribe's heir was accused of continuing and deepening the political traditions of corruption, clientelism, and exclusion so many times blamed for the country's political instability⁴. On his part, Santos accused Mockus of being naïve and not having a grounded grasp of the country's narco-violence, security and economic needs.

On both sides, political strategists and political managers worked hard in crafting these images, in attaching these images to specific recognizable messages, thus steering the candidates' public recognition. The political strategists and political managers of both campaigns played on two mutually constitutive themes--two publicly recognized ways of participating and inhabiting politics--that are in constant and unresolved tension in Colombian public culture: the idea of a yet undelivered, but plausible, political maturity embedded in individual rational calculations benefiting the collective, condensed in the concept of the *voto de opinión*. And a sense of living in a stagnant reality of corruption, violence and social exclusion that requires dexterous pragmatism, and communal care in order to make a living, articulated in the notion of *voto amarrado*.

⁴ Uribe's government was surrounded by several corruption scandals. During the elections particularly two of these episodes had special media attention and were deemed as evidences of clientelistic arrangements. The first one was the use of the program Familias en Acción (designed to give public assistance to families of low income) by some of Uribe's supporters to win votes. The second one was the use of the program Agro Ingreso Seguro (designed to give incentives to small farmers) to benefit landlords who had the ability to mobilize voters in their regions.

I understand the distinction between two kinds of votes as the electoral expression of culturally specific, historically situated ethical discourses of class. As Faubion (2011) discusses à propos Foucault, in the ethical field free and reflexive subjects fashion themselves according to esteemed qualities. Faubion proposes *an* anthropology of ethics that accounts for the limited variability of these subject positions in different sociocultural systems, but that also accounts for the creative and generative ability of individual reflexivity and virtue. Subjects can occupy different subject positions at the same time and be reflexive about it. Hence, his program starts with praxis, with the different things people “do” in becoming those subjects of esteemed qualities, but is also attentive to the normative order of reproduction of the ethical field, what he calls the “themitical dimension of the ethical field” (Faubion 2011:25). In this sense, this program invites the researcher to pay close attention to methodological design and analytical scale. It begs for the systematical observation and interpretation on how cultural specificities, historical processes and global generalities compose fields of meaning, fields where collective communicative practices unfold and reproduce. Simply put, Faubion argues for a systematic understanding of how we come to being, what counts for us as a “life worth living” (2011:24), how we reproduce those ideals of living, and how we reflexively encounter and style our modes of existence.

The *voto de opinión* and the *voto amarrado* at first glance appear to be instrumental categories for the mobilization of voters during electoral times rather than stable forms of being in the world. However, these two categories rehash longstanding discourses about class, education, and nation making at the core of Colombia’s public common sense (Lakoff 2002). Elections are the perfect scenario for these cultural

dispositions to surface since political practitioners play on this known repertoire of available subjectivities to effectively deliver their messages. Anyone who has grown up in Colombia can understand, feel moved, get touched, and compelled to mobilize by the cues and winks underlying political propaganda pieces and political performances. The *voto de opinión* and the *voto amarrado* speak to senses of self and belonging in a socially hierarchical political and national landscape.

During the congressional and presidential elections of 2010, the division between two types of vote organized by class was present in every space where politics was performed and discussed. One of those spaces is the “septimazo,” a Friday afternoon urban event where one of the main roads of Bogotá (carrera séptima) is closed in the downtown area for pedestrians to enjoy. Musicians, street vendors (mostly illegal), and street performers all come together in this space. Those who come to walk around can enjoy all sorts of activities, from Guinea-pig track races to portable karaoke singing. During elections, the “septimazo” provides a vibrant scenario for political demonstrations and rallies. It is a display window for anyone who wants to deliver political messages.

The campaign of Antanas Mockus organized a demonstration on the septimazo that mostly gathered a young, middle to upper-middle class population. Green t-shirts, green balloons, sunflowers, whistles, tambourines, and drums were part of a procession of enthusiasts who hoped to add more followers to their lines. One of the organizers explained that they were doing this massive demonstration to reach those people that normally do not use Facebook. The demonstration was organized via Facebook, but its purpose was to reach people other than the population segments that were already supporting Antanas Mockus, chiefly middle-class urban young people. They were hoping

to attract “all those people who are tired of politics, who are seeking something different, and who believe that with education everything is possible,” one of the organizers claimed. In a rhythmical mantra, the Green party concentration chanted as they walked down carrera séptima: “Voto inteligente, Antanas Presidente” [An intelligent vote, Antanas for President] or “Mi profesor, mi Presidente” [My professor, my President].

The messages that the Green Party participants delivered alluded to the idea of appealing to the *voto de opinión*. The representations of this kind of vote that circulate in the Colombian media and political spaces articulate liberal notions of citizenship. The opinion voter is portrayed as an autonomous thinker (Kant 2009), an informed and educated individual able to engage in public spaces for rational-critical deliberation that will positively impact the common good (Dewey 1954; Habermas 1989). This voter is also prone to emotion—but not the paralyzing deep passions—but the inspiring sentiments of collective indignation spurred by injustice and hope for a better future⁵. Building a citizen culture through education has been the center of Mockus’s intellectual and political program. When he was Mayor of Bogotá, he put in motion different programs for citizen pedagogy seeking to transform Bogotaneans’ ideas of the public space. He used pedagogical methods such as the public scolding of selfish behavior in public space, like mimes mocking those who did not respect the pedestrian strip to cross the street. In his campaign in 2010, education and being a better citizen respectful of the common good continued to be his political message. He appealed to those ‘intelligent ones’, the

⁵ Scholars who have approached social movements from a cultural perspective have reconciled the long-standing western binary of emotions as opposed to rationality (Archila 2006; Edelman 2005; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Lemaitre 2009; Satterfield 2004; Scott 1976). This perspective acknowledges how common moral frames, especially collective ideas and representations of justice, spur emotions that are strategically mobilized in generating common identities and coordinating actions. I will expand more on this topic on chapter 3.

educated middle class, as his base for support and sought to transform the undesirable behaviors of those who did not engage the public according to this normative worldview.

Class in the making

The transformation imperative that Mockus and his followers vehemently demanded is anchored in long-standing class formations. Class in Colombia has often being understood through a Marxian framework of ownership (or dispossession) of land - the principal means of production (Fals-Borda 2002; LeGrand 1986). This lens has often served as explanation for the perdurability of a civil war where the names of the actors change, but where the inequalities remain the same. For instance, up to this day, the state has interiorized these inequalities in its own intuitional functioning. Public services are hierarchically organized in strata and charged accordingly, where stratum 1 is the poorest and 6 is the wealthiest. The (very real and present) materiality of class organization, however, overshadows the more complex class relations in urban settings, relations that are at play in the constitution of the political discourses mobilized during elections. In cities, more prevalently, class is also filtered through family genealogies, claims to taste and education, rather than just money (Bourdieu 1984). Historical depth provides a sense and a linear narrative of being in the world that is not just anchored in possession/dispossession dichotomies. Although their historical depth render these class dynamics quasi-static, there is a further complication to class, a form of mobility that can be achieved through the cultivation of education (Faubion 2011). In this way, class is a dislocated and fractured notion prone to controversy and conflict. Class is materially and historically defined, but also overflows these definitions. These contentious class politics

were at the core of political messages during the elections of 2010.

Mockus' flag on education as a tool for transformation is a known theme for Bogotaneans and those from other regions who have arrived to Bogotá. The nation building projects in the XIXth century were carried out from Bogotá, even though the city was visibly poorer than other more prosperous regions of Colombia (Samper 1969). The economic depression was so widespread that the white elites of Spanish descent cohabited with the traditionally poor (the indigenous populations); the spatial layout in the city did not serve as a marker of class distinction, unlike other productive and wealthy areas in Colombia (Mejía 1999).

The impoverished elite of Bogotá legitimized and reasserted its bureaucratic power, as well as their class position, by claiming as their identity markers education, good manners, civility and a euro-centered cosmopolitanism (Martínez 2001). Bogotá became to be known as the "Athens of South America" since the small intellectual circles of bureaucrats (who were also often poets and philologists) held their meetings in Greek (Deas 1993). Soon, education, rather than economic privileges, became a class marker in the microcosm of Bogotá. Being a good citizen, being civil, could not be bought by any goods but only achieved through conscientious cultivation. Such an ideal became a contentious notion within the national project that would be replicated and contested throughout the Colombian territory.

In the history of Bogotá, a history intimately tied to the national construction of Colombia, this idea continued to be rehashed in different moments. During the 1950s and 1960s, when the developmental framework was at full force worldwide, Bogotá became a synonym of rationality and progress (Saldarriaga 2006). The populations displaced by the

bipartisan civil war arrived to a context where their rural practices were deemed undesirable and contrary to the ideals of the city. These new inhabitants had to learn how to become urban. In the later decades of the 20th century when participation became the leading model for politics, Bogotá became an inclusive space for all. Mockus, in his first term as Mayor of Bogotá, led this flag. His project for inclusion was systematic. He advocated, as a good Habermasian⁶, for constructing through education a common rationality and a common ethical ground where conflicts and differences could be negotiated, a particular form of inhabiting the polis framed by the boundaries provided by

Declaración de apoyo a Antanas Mockus (Semana, May 26th 2010)

Nosotros, los abajo firmantes, expresamos nuestro fuerte apoyo a la candidatura de Antanas Mockus a la presidencia de Colombia.

El dramático éxito de las iniciativas que emprendió como alcalde de Bogotá le han hecho merecedor no sólo del apoyo y la admiración de millones de sus conciudadanos, sino también del interés y la cooperación de expertos en políticas públicas urbanas y científicos sociales, como nosotros, en muchos países.

El núcleo de su aproximación imaginativa y única a los problemas urbanos -desde el ahorro de agua hasta la protección a la vida- es una idea simple y poderosa: Cuando no podemos monitorear el comportamiento de los ciudadanos ni resolver problemas con pagos de dinero, podemos apelar a lo mejor en cada uno, y dejar que los ciudadanos se hagan mutuamente responsables de acuerdo con los principios renovados de la cultura ciudadana.

Dada su reputación de integridad, la presidencia de Antanas Mockus ofrecerá una oportunidad única para cambiar el clima dominante de desconfianza que obstaculiza la paz social y el crecimiento económico en Colombia.

the law.

In the 2010 election, Mockus' political platform was based on this life-long project that resonated with Bogotá's and Colombia's history. His democratic ideal strived to educate in order to accomplish a political civility that served as the foundation for a more horizontal society. In another moment of the "septimazo," the contentious politics of

⁶ In a public statement, Habermas, among other intellectuals, endorsed and supported Mockus' presidential Campaign for 2010 (see textbox).

class arose in spite of the civilizing inclusion of Mockus' discourse. The anti-fascist skinheads organized a parallel demonstration to the one organized by the Green party. They marched down the street as a disciplined army as they chanted, cursed and accused the Green Party project of being fascist. To avoid any fights, and honoring their political ideals, the Green Party members patiently waited for the skinhead army standing quietly on the curb holding a pencil up in the air, as a symbol for the transformative power of education. Nothing happened. Education and peacefulness combined allowed the Green Party demonstration to keep going its way. They continued their task of inviting people to join, chanting as they walked: "Señor peatón, únase al montón, vote por Antanas si quiere educación" [Mr. Pedestrian, join the crowd, vote for Antanas if you want education]. Some joined. But those who are not part of Mockus's model for the polity stayed aside, sometimes throwing insults at the green crowd, composing a very coarse visual image of marginality. A street vendor yelled from the top of her lungs: "Booo, down, Mockus, you trash!" Fury lit her eyes. "Basura!" [you trash]. In his years as Mayor, Mockus, in his attempt to recuperate the public space, he engaged in a battle with illegal street vendors. Often, police cars would raid the city to 'clean' public spaces from street vendors, confiscating their merchandise. "All of us street vendors are against Mockus" the woman explained. "We almost never vote; we don't have anyone to organize us nor to help us. But I already talked to friends and family (...) Us the poor are much more than the rich, and that man [Antanas Mockus] won't come to power!"

This vignette illustrates the contentious class encounters that arise when the *voto de opinión* meets the *voto amarrado* [tied vote]. As Auyero (2000) argues, elaborating on the argument of Guillermo O'Donnell (1994), clientelism in Latin America has been

overrepresented in expert discourse as the main political form of engagement of rural and poor populations without carefully analyzing its implications for the operation of the state at the local level. As this vignette shows, rather than the *voto amarrado* being an “empty” and simplistic category susceptible to reform, it is an active form of engaging with the state under very real conditions of dispossession and marginality. As the statement of the street vendor conveys when she regrets not having anyone to organize her “friends and family,” clientelistic networks formalize ties of solidarity and trust for political purposes, in order to “help” those who cannot access state services by institutional channels, those who by means of sheer hunger fall out of the scope of civilizing discourses. Seen in this light, the “voto amarrado” is yet another iteration of an ethics of face-to-face care and solidarity within a neoliberal state that increasingly narrows its welfare services (Muehlebach 2012).

These very complex class conditions that articulate opposite ethical imperatives form the landscape where politics is mobilized. While there are groups that overtly work for the reformation of a political culture of clientelism, there is a wide consensus that these clientelistic networks and arrangements are the “natural” locus for politics. While the opinion vote is very volatile, the tied vote is predictable and stable. While opinion voters at times might not participate, the “tied vote” is the heart of the political machine. In this fashion, anyone working within the realm of politics, from NGOs to politicians, navigates these ethical discourses, negotiating their own political identities in doing so. Often these negotiations occur within the framework and through the language provided by participatory politics.

The framing power of participatory politics

The introduction of participatory politics with the constitution of 1991 provided the Colombian public with a normative discursive formation to both reassert and contest class positions within the polity. During electoral times, campaigns play with this language in order to convey ideas of hope for a future of lawfulness and political inclusion. In the presidential campaigns of 2010, for instance, Santos' campaign appealed to a socially and politically inclusive future to be "constructed together", while Mockus' highlighted the need to move from Uribe's militaristic state to the reinforcement of a "culture of legality" respectful of norms. The brighter futures that both campaigns portrayed played with two notions that since the 1980s and early 1990s have become synonyms of a desired political modernity in Colombian public culture: legality and political inclusion. In short, legality and political inclusion are a *metaphor* to talk about a desired modern nation, and have provided a linear form of narration that inscribes the nation within the modern ideal of progress (Bhabha 1994); more legality: more inclusion: more progress: more modern.

This discursive formation is so pervasive in talking about and imagining politics that political claims and political messages are often delivered in a participatory key, with an underlying class commentary. One of the least known candidates of the 2010 presidential race chained himself to the Simón Bolívar statue, located in the main square of Bogotá, to reclaim participation and inclusion. Robinson Devia, a newcomer in politics who appeared out of the blue and could register his candidacy by collecting one million signatures⁷, was protesting for barely receiving media attention. His main claim was that

⁷ The electoral legislation allows candidates and political movements, independent from recognized political parties, to register their candidacy by collecting citizen signatures

Santos and Mockus were overrepresented in media and that the other voices also taking part in the presidential race were silenced. For that reason, he and his closest followers chained themselves to Bolívar and started a “hunger strike” to end when their claims were satisfied.

The candidate and his followers wore the t-shirts that represented their political movement. All of them shared a long chain that chained them to one another and to the statue of Simón Bolívar. There was no food, just some *tinto* [coffee] to calm down the hunger, keep the energy up and the bodies warm. Sleeping bags, trash bags, pigeons and clothes served as the back setting. A little bucket and a black cloth served as the “private” latrine. “The candidate has to go to the bathroom,” someone yells. Another collaborator rushes to him with the black cloth and the bucket. They cover him up and hand him the bucket while the people at the Bolívar Square stare at the scene. The TV News crew arrives. The candidate stands up and makes good use of the media attention. He delivers a speech sending his main point across and, in passing, advertises his political platform. In the meantime, I approach the statue to try to get an interview. The media manager of the campaign approaches me. She is the only member of Devia’s team who is not chained and who has clearly had a chance to take a good night’s sleep and a shower. She lets me through to talk to one of Devia’s collaborators, a man chained on the other side of the statue, hidden from the public eye.

We are protesting because the media haven’t showed balanced information about the campaigns. We have filed complaints to all the electoral regulatory entities. We get what any common citizen gets, answers delaying the petition. Our candidate is a common citizen, he belongs to stratum three, ordinary people can identify with him. We decided to chain ourselves because the Colombian people are also

chained, it is a symbol (...) what can a regular citizen do when her rights have been violated and the State⁸ is not there to defend her? Chains are the only answer. (...) It's time for Colombians to rule their country. Our symbol is the butterfly. Our political constitution is the butterfly that we have to become, but still we are in a worm (sic) State. We know we are a butterfly because the law tells us so, but those who have governed us are worms and keep us in a worm (sic) state.

Butterflies, worms and citizenship are mixed together in a narrative of individual and collective transformation. Devia's collaborator conveys, in rather crude terms, the desire to morph from a state that works for a few to a state that includes all, ideas that were introduced and legitimated in public culture with the drafting of the political constitution of 1991. This new legislative framework was expected to give birth to a new polity inhabited by new citizens. This new polity would not be elitist or hierarchical, neither would it be embedded in a rigid social class structure or in party bipartisanship. Rather, this new polity would be observant of civic rights regardless of socioeconomic condition, political beliefs, religion, ethnicity or gender. This new polity would promote unity and inclusion, while respectful of cultural differences. But for Devia and his followers, as for many other Colombians, the promise has never been fulfilled but still remains a plausible reality worth chaining oneself for.

⁸ Devia's follower played with the words state, as a condition of being, and State, as the Liberal State, for his metaphor.



Roinson Devia's Hunger Strike. Bogotá May 12th 2010, Personal Photographic Archive.

Julieta Lemaitre (2009) identifies this collective fascination with legalistic discourse as “legal fetishism.” The law, more than a normative prescription that defines the parameters for sociopolitical interaction in Colombia, is the representation of collective desires for peace, lawfulness and order. The law symbolizes the possibility of a different political world and the possibility of becoming participant and responsible political subjects. Law is an object of desire that is written but not enforced (Taussig 2005)⁹. In this sense, the written law gives shape to a future, nonexistent world that contrasts to a very real and current sense of living in a world of chaos and corruption. Discourses about law and political participation provide a plausible utopia in the land of dystopia, and therefore are highly effective in mobilizing collective hope. Politicians

⁹ In Bogotá alone the impunity rates for murder from June 2007 to June 2010 reached 71.2% (El Espectador 2010).

during electoral season appeal to it, but also everyone else trying to legitimize their actions in the political arena. For instance, in the past years, the National Development Plans¹⁰ have been named as follows: “Propesperity for all” (2010-2014), “The Communitarian State: development for all” (2006-2010), “Towards a Communitarian State” (2002-2006), “A Change for Peace” (1998-2002), “The Social Leap” (1994-1998), just to name a few. This language stands in contrast to a highly hierarchical social structure of class. Ideas of sharing prosperity, the state, or peace are crafted in public discourse to contrast a reality of disenfranchisement and poverty¹¹.

In this way, the political constitution of 1991 epitomizes a fracture between civil rights and economics (Caldeira and Holston 1999), which as in other Latin American reformed constitutional frameworks, is an odd mix of progressive social rights and a conservative (read neoliberal) economic model (Dezalay and Garth 2002; Lemaitre 2009). Looking back at the social movements and political actors that pushed for the constitutional reforms in the early 1990s, it is possible to observe these paradoxes of class and participation. The social movement organized by upper-middle class students from Bogotá to reform the political system successfully attained its goal by articulating and translating a global language of open markets and civic participation to localized sentiments. In this process, global discourses on participation were coded in a class key. The local elites asserted their social position by bridging universals constructed internationally with the realities at home (Delazay and Garth 2002). As Samuel

¹⁰ Every new government is required by law to make public a plan of Government at the beginning of each term, containing the programmatic guidelines that will be executed. Citizens can hold accountable their governments by overseeing if the goals have been met.

¹¹ According to the latest information available on wealth distribution worldwide, Colombia is the 8th most uneven country in the world (CIA-The World Factbook).

Huntington (1991) analyzes, the “third wave” of political democratization around the world (1974-1990s) had elites play a preponderant role. Although Huntington provides more of a descriptive analysis, this observation is fruitful for questioning how local elites mediate global discourses of participation from their elite social position and construct local political epistemologies reproduced in public culture (Delazay and Garth 2002).

During the fieldwork months of fragmented political experiences, the awareness of social class unified the different political actors that I interacted with. The main key informants of this project belonged in one way or another to the generation that reformed the constitution. They were all part of an intellectual or an economic elite. For instance, the visible heads of Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE) started their political lives as the leaders of the student movement that pushed for the reformation of the constitution, while the political strategists I worked with learned the ropes of political managing during their involvements with the governments of transition.

Although my informants pretty much stand in separate camps, they all appealed to the division between *voto de opinión* and *voto amarrado* to explain the country’s political situation. In these notions, they assert very subtle class positioning evinced in claims about the ‘proper’ ways to partake in a novel participatory democratic political system. But, in order to understand how class disposition and ideas about political modernity intertwine in these categories that frame political participation, let’s take a look back at the historical processes unchained with the reformation of the political constitution in 1991.

Going back to the root: Séptima Papeleta Social Movement

Everything was like an express cooker: the bombs exploded among us, the dead bodies fell on us, and the congress decided that a reform to the

political system was not possible. It was like walking on a dead end street, the people in charge were incapable of making decisions. Were we supposed to remain seated and wait until they killed us all? We were mobilized by collective indignation (Interview with Claudia López).

Claudia López, journalist and political analyst, belongs to the last generation of students who believed in changing the world through collective mobilization. She was member of the student movement of “La séptima papeleta”¹² that transformed Colombia’s institutions by achieving the unthinkable: calling for the reformation of the political constitution of 1886. As Julieta Lemaitre (2009) explains, the political constitution of 1886 only allowed any amendments via congressional actions; there was no room for civil movements to participate in any constitutional reform. These students’ claims for the modernization of political institutions found an important support network in their professors (who had connections in the government), some sectors in the traditional political parties, the leftist political movements that had recently abandoned the armed struggle, and the liberal print media. Out of very diverse motivations and interests, an array of groups formed a civilian coalition to claim and promote, what was seen at the moment as the rebirth of the state or the outlining of a new “social contract.”

Starting with a clean slate by dismantling the institutional foundations of the political traditions of Colombia became an imperative. The situation begged for such drastic actions. The rising industry of drug traffic had spread its tentacles of influence to the higher levels of government. Scandals of corruption, violence and death were the

¹² The “séptima papeleta” movement that pushed for the reformation of the constitution got its name from a mobilization tactic. Since the 1886 constitution did not allow referenda, this social movement in conjunction with the government proposed to have an extra ballot in the local and regional elections to express the civil will for reforming the constitution. This ballot was not officially issued. Rather, a variety of civic actors (including the liberal newspapers) printed and handed out the ballot for people to take to the voting polls.

centerpiece in the daily news. As several analysts argue (Leal Buitrago and Davila L. 1990; Lemaitre 2009; Thoumi 1999), the exclusionary, clientelistic and authoritarian political structure of the country was a fertile ground for drug moneys and narco-cultures to succeed. Moreover, the lack of any means for public control, accountability or transparency practices lent itself to shadowy associations. Politicians and drug lords benefited from one another. The mafias had the money to sponsor any political endeavor; the politicians had the political power to benefit this thriving illegal business. The situation became so dramatic that in 1989 three presidential candidates were murdered. Claudia López remembers this episode with profound indignation. As she recalls, “the country was moved by the murder of Galán [the liberal candidate], I was devastated by the murder of Bernardo Jaramillo [the leftist candidate].”¹³ The situation had reached a point in which it did not matter what political color anybody wore: everyone had a soul to mourn.

In this context, the call for unity and civic mobilization beyond partisan lines constituted a horizon of hope for a new collective future without violence. To this end, the political constitution had as its main goal to decentralize and pluralize the government structure. The longstanding exclusionary and clientelistic bipartisan tradition of Colombia was the target of these reforms. The different and diverse actors involved in the movement for the reformation of the constitution agreed that the party structure of the country, and its distribution of political power, was at the heart of the widespread political violence (Posada-Carbó 1998). The exclusionary partition of power between

¹³ During the Presidential elections of 1990, three presidential candidates were murdered in cold blood. Galan’s death was attributed to Pablo Escobar. Galan had openly denounced the increasing influence of Escobar in the government. Carlos Pizarro, former M-19 guerrilla leader, and Bernardo Jaramillo, UP candidate (leftist party), were murdered by paramilitary hands.

Liberales and *Conservadores*, which in the 1960s had delivered peace, was now to blame for fueling violence.

In order to understand better the party dynamics that the reforms were aiming to disarticulate, we have to shift attention to a landmark in Colombia's political history, *La Violencia*. During the 1950s, Colombia experienced one of the bloodiest episodes in its political history. The bloodshed was so brutal that this historical event is named "La Violencia" with capital letters, to signal that violence was the only thing that happened during those years. *Liberales* and *Conservadores*, the two traditional political parties, engaged in a crude civil war mainly in rural areas, while the cities remained relatively peaceful. In the countryside, *Liberales* (mainly) were being displaced and dispossessed of their lands by the Conservatives through brutal violence. The motivation was the long years of exclusion from the political system that the party experienced during Liberal rule. In return, the *Liberales* organized guerrilla warfare to avenge their dead. In 1953, a military coup instated a four-year dictatorship that "pacified" the country. When civilian rule returned, *Liberales* and *Conservadores* agreed on a truce known as *Frente Nacional* to avoid future conflict.

From 1958 until 1974, *Liberales* and *Conservadores* shared power by a rule of alternation. What this meant was that every government period had to be alternated between the two parties. When one party was in office, the other one was guaranteed to have a share of bureaucratic positions. This arrangement would ensure that the state resources would be equally divided between the two parties. The state sponsorship of a party-oriented bureaucratic apparatus went as far as to grant the infamous *auxilios parlamentarios* to congresspeople. These were state resources given to each

congressperson with virtually no strings attached (Hoskin 1998). In a country where industrialism was fairly incipient, and the biggest employer was the state, controlling state resources was the core of the political game (Palacios and Safford 2002). The regional political chiefs and their political machines of clients and bureaucracy managed how the Colombian state worked. These associations distributed public offices and public contracting among party factions, leaving no room for the broader public to participate in how budgetary lines were distributed (Leal Buitrago and Davila L. 1990). In short, no one other than *Liberales* and *Conservadores* was allowed to take part in this game.

But, in the 1980s with increasing pressures for economic and political liberalization from international organizations as the World Bank, the institutional conditions would change. Liberal President Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) was committed to the economic liberalization and the institutional organization of the country. In 1989, he echoed the collective sentiments of the social movements that were assembling around the idea of reforming the constitution by passing a project for constitutional reform to congress that would open political spaces for other groups. The project was blocked several times. In the eyes of the social movements in favor of reform, these congressional actions were evidence of how the representational and deliberative functions of Congress had been undermined by regional clientelistic arrangements (Hoskin 1998; Lemaitre 2009; Steven Taylor, Botero, and Crisp 2008). A seat in congress represented a group of bureaucratic interests rather than citizen claims. “The people in power were incapable of making decisions” as Claudia López felt, and this was a call to civil society to shake the structures through which decisions actually were made. Following longstanding discussions on party theory, it was time for civil society to stir its political future and

reform the power structures of the country reflected in its party system (Sartori 1976; Weber 1978). By reforming parties and political competition, society would be completely transformed—at least that was the aspiration. The campaign slogan of the man who would become president in 1990 and who led the drafting of the new constitution, Cesar Gaviria, reflected this sentiment of hope for a new Colombia: “The future is now.”

But, what did this envisioned future look like? The reforms introduced citizen participation, decentralization and the flexibilization of the terms to form political associations beyond the traditional parties. The expectation was to disarticulate the highly concentrated forms of power by asserting the citizens’ “sovereignty at every level of government” (Hoskin 1998:60). For this purpose, the possibility of electing governors, of participating in plebiscites, referenda, popular consultations, open meetings, legislative initiative and recall were introduced as constitutional citizen rights (Cepeda 1998). The hope was that citizen groups would closely oversee government, and had the legal tools to take action to protect their own rights. Moreover, state services were decentralized. The local municipalities became administrative units of water, health and education services. Opening the channels for direct citizen participation and decentralization in the instances of political and public expenditure decision-making was expected to remedy a long-standing tradition of patronage, middle powers and brokerage. Participation would bring the so longed-for future, that of “progress” and development (Bell Lemus 1998).

Late liberal rationales are at the core of these notions of hopeful, utopian futures and collective wellbeing. The political reforms in Colombia are the localized incarnation of what are often considered ephemeral global conditions. The political processes of the

late 1980s and early 1990s are part of a globally configured constellation of moral imaginaries, economic rationales, and political dispositions (Ong and Stephen J. Collier 2005; Charles Taylor 2004). The very intimate sentiments of those Colombians who felt in their gut the need to take action in a perceived context of political decay intersected with macro-scalar phenomena of a post-cold war world. The rising enthusiasm for the worldwide rebirth of democracy and civil society after the downfall of leftist and rightist authoritarian rule provided the Colombian public with a language to imagine a future without social exclusion and war. Participatory politics, social democracy and the “Third Way” (Giddens 1998) were the conceptual tools that would provide localized elite agents a framework to think about alternate institutional designs and ways of practicing politics. The return to civic power was the new legitimate remedy to what has been dubbed so many times a “failed state.” The privatization and civil administration of public services would fulfill the role that the state was unable to sustain (Bushnell 1993).¹⁴

This new recipe, proposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, entailed opening markets, decentralizing resources, and promoting private investment. The formula assumed that development and economic success depended on healthy and strong institutions supported by free elections and civic overseeing of government, in order to prevent the vices of corruption. Spontaneous social movements were seen by these international organizations as key actors in implementing these transformations in contexts lacking strong civic organizations, political parties, electoral rules and legislative apparatuses (Payne et al. 2007). “Third Way” politics was

¹⁴ As Bushnell (1993) notes, during the late 1980s and early 1990s the private security services boomed. Since the state was unable to stop the surmounting violence, the privatization of security offered a temporal solution. Sadly, as history shows, these private services sometimes resulted in the organization of paramilitary squads, specially in the rural areas, that keep feeding violence in the country.

particularly appealing to a fragmented political constituency living in a highly stratified society with a highly centralized political system. The “third way” was the hopeful path for civil society to thrive and regain control of its political and economic future beyond partisan lines. It was the moral call of a generation that had seen individual liberties being suffocated by stagnant, and now ontologically empty, ideological divisions and authoritative modes of political engagement. Reminiscing about the call of her generation, “politics can be transformed through politics,” Claudia López vehemently affirms. “Politics can transform the life of people in a good way. Politics can not screw people over, it can not displace them, it can not murder them, it can not steal from them, it can employ them, it can make their life better, it can make the life of a child better. All that can be achieved through politics.”

Political rejuvenation

For politics to change through politics, the reformation of the political and electoral system was imperative. As in other countries in Latin America, in Colombia this task was carried out under a government of young technocrats closely aligned with and influenced by the United States (Lemaitre 2009).¹⁵ The media satirically named President Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994) and his cabinet “Gaviria’s Kinder”, a label that pointed to the rejuvenation of a political class that was publicly regarded as stagnant and mummified. This new class of political practitioners contrasted with the old class of “gentlemen politicians” in their trust in technocratic knowledge and meritocratic systems

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that my informants who were active in politics during this period of transition have different connections to the U.S. They have either studied in the U.S, worked at the Organization of American States in Washington D.C, have involvements with U.S based non-profit organizations or some sort of relation with the U.S government.

rather than the use of personal connections for political management (Dezalay and Garth 2002). Miguel Silva, top Latin-American consultant and private secretary of Cesar Gaviria's government, looks back on his generation to analyze a major shift in the inner workings of politics:

I do believe there was a whole generation of young people--who went into politics after the constitution on 1991--who inherited that romantic outlook of being able to do politics without political machineries; who believed in and appealed to the 'voto de opinion'. What happens at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s is the emergence of an urban opinion vote. When the country [had a demographic structure] where 30% was urban and 70% was rural, there was one political reality. When this reverses, the political reality changes. And it is very interesting indeed because an independent voter starts to emerge (...) As this opinion vote emerges, and the political parties [and their machineries] are unable to channel this vote, independent candidates start to appear.

Miguel Silva's explanation articulates the point of view of a generation who went into politics to reform it from the inside, and who transformed all the institutional platforms of the country according to perceptions of a changing social and political world. This generation believed in a dramatic shift in the political behavior of Colombians due to the urbanization processes unchained by years of civil war and inner displacement.

The history of electoral reforms in Colombia, after the constitution of 1991, points to the historic tension between desired political futures designed by urban and technocratic elites and an institutional infrastructure that favors clientelistic networks. This is another locus where the historic class configurations discussed earlier play out.

The association of urban environments to an independent, self-reliant voter who acts on self-judgment rather than on necessity has produced a fragmented conceptual mapping of Colombia. As Serje (2005) discusses, the legitimate expert knowledge of intellectuals and technocrats designing public policy reproduced a national landscape of segmentation. Urban areas were socially constructed as hegemonic spaces of order and modernity, while rural and “frontier” areas served as the reversed mirror of that modernity -- as what Foucault calls heterotopias. These spaces of lawlessness, but also of possible liberation, legitimized the need for a modern ordering. In Colombia, this territorial configuration has been so pervasive that throughout the two hundred years of republican history there have been different attempts to integrate both kinds of territories into a unified national project. In the XIXth century “the warm hinterlands”¹⁶ were the object of “pacification” and civilization through multiple civil wars, commerce and religious missions (Bolívar and Arias Vanegas 2006), while in the late XXth century participatory democracy and administrative decentralization constituted the promise of national unity.

In this fashion, the political and electoral reforms of the early 1990s both sought to transform rural political practices and also sought to give an institutional platform for a burgeoning urban vote to thrive. The electoral and party system underwent a radical rupture that deeply shook the strategies for exercising and practicing politics successfully. As was mentioned earlier, the constitution introduced more flexible rules for political

¹⁶ The Conservative President, Miguel Antonio Caro, who took part in the drafting of the constitution of 1886 used the pejorative term “warm hinterlands” to refer to the Colombia other than Bogotá. He considered Bogotá to be the center of civilization in Colombia and the legitimate place for a civilizing and unifying national project to spread. In one of his essays about the Spanish Conquest he regrets “¡Cuan profunda tristeza causa la idea de que en vez de haber dilatado la civilización su radio, en muchas partes ha perdido terreno!” (1951: 291). [The thought that civilization instead of broadening its radius, in many part it has lost terrain is profoundly sad!]

association. The constitution recognized grass-root social movements as legitimate political organizations that could enter the political arena, thus harvesting a plethora of movements organized along ethnic, civic and religious lines (Moreno 2005). The enthusiasm for participation was such that by 2002, 85 political parties were officially registered (Reyes González 2004). This unexpected outcome in party numbers was not foreseen with the reformation of the constitution. The new legislative framework introduced the programmatic vote along with the flexibilization of association, a modality that legally binds candidates to effectively delivering their electoral promises, as a way to have more direct citizen-candidate overseeing and hence a tighter representative regime. The expectation was that the programmatic vote would ensure that the “opinion voter” would have the adequate tools actively and effectively to participate in the democratic process, from election to government implementation. It was assumed that political parties would organically organize attuned with their voters around programmatic lines.

However, the explosion of political parties is indicative of the persistence of politics mobilized by personalized networks in Colombia’s electoral process in spite of the constitutional reforms (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). As several analysts have described (Crisp and Ingall 2002; Cristina Escobar 2002; Moreno and Escobar-Lemmon 2008; Steven Taylor, Botero, and Crisp 2008), the pre-reform, bipartisan electoral system sponsored the creation of electoral “entrepreneurs” within the two traditional *Conservador* and *Liberal* parties. The electoral system allowed having several voting lists for a given electoral district within the same party. This form of organization promoted the creation of factions and intraparty competition undermining party discipline and encouraging the creation of personalized networks of candidates and voters connected by

the negotiation of different degrees of personal benefit.

The constitutional reforms did not reform the party list system. The traditional political parties and heads of party factions benefitted from this situation in order to maintain the control of the electoral machines in this moment of party-explosion. Through most of the 1990s, the Liberal party maintained a majority in Congress by putting in motion what was known as “Operación Avispa” [Operation Wasp]. This operation consisted in having as many party lists as possible in order to have more chances to win seats (Moreno and Escobar-Lemmon 2008). This situation increased the political power of electoral brokers who played a crucial role in finding and organizing the votes for particular lists (S. Taylor, Botero, and Crisp 2008). In this way, the traditional clientelistic arrangements were perpetuated while the long sought institutional order seemed further out of sight.

By 2003 a political reform was passed in Congress in order to organize what had become a competition of electoral machines and entrepreneurs. The multiple party list system was debunked. Political parties were also subject to strict conditions for legal recognition and for accessing state funds, such as establishing a voting threshold. Soon the number of parties narrowed down but the intraparty competition increased. The single-list system introduced with the 2003 political reform gives the possibility of having either a closed list or an open list. If the party decides to run with a closed list, this means that votes are cast for the whole list and the seats are allotted according to the division of the total number of votes the list obtained by the quota needed to gain a seat. The candidates in the list win a seat according to their placement in the list. For instance, if X list gets 5 seats, the first 5 candidates inscribed will get a seat. With the open list

system, the voter has the option to vote for individual candidates within a particular list regardless of the position of the candidate within the list. In this way, it is possible for the last candidate in the list to win a seat. In this modality, despite their party lines, candidates ferociously compete for the votes, just as in the old system.

Therefore, the intra-party competition and the still loose regulations for party discipline became a central point for further reform after the public learned about the scandalous associations of congress people and paramilitaries in 2006.¹⁷ Hence, in 2008 another reform was passed that sought to regulate party discipline by penalizing dual party militancy and party switching, and also obliged parties to penalize those members with ties to illegal groups. Up until this very recent moment, the legislation allowed the overlapping of actors across political organizations (Moreno 2005), thus undermining group control and therefore rewarding personalistic political attitudes.

This contradictory institutional environment has fostered a visibly fragmented electoral system mobilized both by factional allegiance and by the “opinion vote.” As in many other places in the world with democratic systems, in Colombian elections entailing a local territorial circumscription, clientelistic networks run the show. By contrast, in elections entailing a national circumscription the vote is eminently an “opinion vote” (S. Taylor, Botero, and Crisp 2008). Electoral observers, political analysts and political practitioners of all sorts work within this framework, thus recreating the social construction of a fragmented cartography of political modernity in Colombia. The local elections, where decentralization is at work in that localities are choosing their

¹⁷ By 2008, after the parapolitics scandal saw the public light, 25% of congress was either being investigated or in jail. One of the main concerns for the 2010 election was the paramilitary and mafia infiltration in the campaigns (MOE 2010).

governments, are represented in public discourse as the space for a rural and poor political “anti-modernity” to surface. In contrast, the Presidential election where the distance between the candidate and his or her constituency is mediated by image-based politics is represented as the space for the modern subject to awake. Nevertheless, these two sides of the coin are inseparable and belong to the same political logic. As all of my informants so many times repeated regardless of their position in the political game, “In time for the presidential elections, the machine has already been oiled”. Oiling the machine entails putting all of its parts to work together. Hence, by the time of the presidential elections the local, regional and national political structures are in tune, aligned to work together. The management of the two kinds of votes is an art that professional political consultants and managers master in Colombia.

Chapter 3

The Division of Electoral Labor or the Location of Politics

Every political campaign entails the synchronicity of a variety of forms of expertise. Market researchers provide political strategists with the technical analysis of public opinion and voters' attitudes. Political strategists provide insights for the organization of a campaign plan according to market analysis and by interpreting the political conditions in which the campaign develops. Advertisers translate into audiovisual products the strategic directives. Campaign managers, campaign promoters and volunteers mobilize local allegiances with civic organizations that translate into votes. At the center of all this stand the politicians, who direct and are the front faces of this immense machinery.

The assemblage of different forms of expertise in the industry of political management evinces the intimate intertwinement of political and economic rationales in late liberal politics. In Colombian political administration, mass-market environments managed through marketing intersect and interact with small-scale environments for political negotiation, where face-to-face networks of allegiance and interest prevail. These interactions have sponsored the dislocation of the political to different scaled spaces that presuppose different logics, as well as the creation of conglomerates of what appear as contradictory forms of expertise. Looking closely to campaign dynamics in Colombia, these seemingly inconsistent expert landscapes find points of connection through the division of electoral labor.

In this chapter, I argue that even though these distinct forms of management are contradictory in appearance, they share a liberal core. Liberalism entails a contractual relation present both in the management of mass-markets environments and also in the negotiation of private interest (Westbrook 2004). With the rise of business-oriented approaches to politics, the calculations to win votes have become imperative, therefore making this transactional aspect of liberalism more acute. Votes are valued, and the value of participating in the electoral political race lies in the votes. However, the scales in which these contractual relations operate are different, showing that in late liberal politics, these scales are porous and fluid, making scales sometimes overlap. We are not talking anymore about the stock exchange market on one hand and the corner bakery as opposite. Or the presidential race on one side and local councilman race on the other one. All scales are articulated. As the local bakery will be affected by the fluctuations of the stock market, presidential races are also affected by the most local politics. This overlapping poses real challenges to the operation of the political field and to how political management is organized.

In the realm of electoral politics, marketing rationales and other forms of constructing political identities are in constant tension. The political marketing practices, geared to galvanize public emotions around certain identity markers (liberal and conservative issues of public interest, styles of government, political parties, class, ethnicity, gender, for example), compete with other forms of emotional identification, chiefly networks of allegiance. Both of these forms of management are stabilizing models to obtain and manage information, and therefore conduct “human nature,” but differ in the scales that they approach. Marketing is geared to stir PUBLIC OPINION as a faceless

social phenomenon while small-scale political environments are grounded on close-knit, atomized sociopolitical organizations. In our current political moment, the perspective of scale is blurry, thus too often rendering ontologically different phenomena equivalent. Therefore, the technical, transparent management of a mass-scale society is desired as political correctness (Marilyn Strathern 2000) while smaller spaces for political negotiation are often labeled through such problematic concepts as corruption (Hasty 2005; Haller and Shore 2005), as if they pertained to the same analytical level. Adding complexity, the Colombian cultural filter codes the moralization of these different scales as class behavior.

I start by outlining the introduction of expert management into Colombian politics, and explain how it combines and reconciles competing forms of political rationality; mainly a media-based, public opinion oriented management and the administration of private networks of interest. I explore how the institutional reforms and the notions of a fragmented vote in Colombia are compatible with a late liberal moment in political communication, that of political marketing, characterized by the segmentation of the electoral markets (Fritz Plasser and Gunda Plasser 2002).

Secondly, I look at the debates that arise in what political management is supposed to be or do, as an entry point to probe the tensions and points of discussion between market-centered models of political administration and an interest-centered political model. I thereby trace the historic evolution of liberal politics and economics in shaping political practice.

Last, I analyze how the interpretation of the principle of segmentation according to class lines shapes also a fractured political practice where different forms of expertise

are put forth to administer these segmented realms. In doing so, I bring to question the inner traits that make the political field distinct from other professional fields. In managing the *voto de opinión*, techno-scientific instruments and forms of expertise are deployed in order to conduct public emotions. This kind of management is associated with normative notions of democracy and is often carried out by public elite figures. In managing the *voto amarrado*, interest and need mediate relationships of care managed by seasoned politicians and community organizers who claim experience as their source of legitimacy.

Managing personalities: U.S consultants in Colombia

With the introduction of participatory politics, the dismantling of a bipartisan party system, and the liberalization of the market, the professional industry of political management was born in Colombia. Although there is no official history of the entrance of political consultancy to Colombia, the different political strategists I interviewed throughout my fieldwork signaled the presidential race of 1985/1986, between Conservative candidate Alvaro Gómez and Liberal candidate Virgilio Barco, as the first campaigns to follow strategic directives. Virgilio Barco hired Jack Leslie, a U.S political consultant, to help design his strategy. This event in Colombian electoral politics marked a shift in political practice in the country, from an eminently close-knit, face-to-face network oriented form of doing politics to the need for an expert management of public opinion and media practices. As in other countries that underwent political reforms during the eighties, Colombia's opening political system begged for expert media

management. The U.S tradition of media-oriented, candidate-centered political management provided a model to follow (Johnson 2009).

Eduardo Mestre, a senior politician who was a member of the central committee of Virgilio Barco's campaign, remembers this time as a point of inflection in politics. As he recalls, when the presidential race began, the conditions were not favorable for Barco's campaign. The Conservative party was strong in power. For Barco to stand a chance, he would have to stir an apathetic voting population profoundly disenchanted by the bureaucratic arrangements that the parties had resorted to in previous years. Jack Leslie was hired to help design a strategy in a context where political parties were losing disciplined members as well as their ability to agglutinate, and in which television was becoming the major source of entertainment and information for the broad population¹⁸.

The situation demanded drastic changes in electoral competition and the U.S consultants brought in innovative tools that would change politics forever. Mestre remembers how media management took a preponderant role in this campaign. The first action was to hire an opinion poll and conduct focus groups, something that had been done for marketing purposes but that was done for the first time in politics. Both the design and the interpretation of the results of the polls and the focus groups were under the U.S campaign team's command.

Second, the campaign established an advisory technical committee to give unity to all the publicity and media materials of the campaign. The speeches that Barco delivered were carefully written and revised according to strategic directives rather than

¹⁸ The demand for TV was increasing so much that in 1985 Belisario Betancourt relaxed open the institutional way for private cable TV to exist. In 1987 the first cable company started operations. Previously, all TV channels were publicly owned. Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, sala virtual http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/exhibiciones/historia_tv/1985.htm).

letting the candidate improvise, a talent that traditional politicians were expected to have. For the first time, the public image of a candidate, his charisma, was built through expert techniques rather than left to its own devices.

Virgilio Barco was not charismatic; he was a “technical executive”, as Mestre describes him. Therefore his campaign team had to work to build an image that the television consumer would like. He didn’t appear in any televised debates since his conservative opponent was known for being an astounding public speaker. Rather, his television appearances were planned to the last detail. Mestre remembers how this was a constant source of tension between the candidate and his international advisory team. In one of these appearances, the U.S team strongly suggested to the candidate to wear a new tie that would look better on TV, something more suited for television. Barco took deep offense. He loved his old ties. Most importantly, he did not understand how a tie would win an election. Mestre laughs out loud as he remembers this incident.

Even though it may seem only a funny anecdote, this episode is indicative of a moment of change in political rationales. Certainly, a tie would not win an election, but for the first time, a tie would help to win one. Barco’s campaign took off after the sad events of November 1985 when the M-19 Guerrilla held the Supreme Court hostage. The military intervened, and in a very confusing operation, all of the magistrates were murdered and some workers of the Supreme Court were reported as disappeared. The conservative president Betancourt was heavily criticized for how he handled this crisis. Barco and his team seized the opportunity. In every medium, Barco openly denounced the government’s handling of the Supreme Court’s events. He also promulgated a return to an all-liberal government, a return to the liberal party’s identity. As Mestre remembers,

liberals started to “creep from under the rocks.” With the chant “Dale, Rojo, Dale¹⁹” [Go, Red, Go] stirring public emotions, people felt that they were part of something again. Hope had returned. And the media management of this hope won the election.

The rise of American political consultancy as a global practice mainly occurred during the 1980s when television became the lead medium worldwide (Fritz Plasser 2000; Fritz Plasser and Gunda Plasser 2002; Fritz Plasser and Lengauer 2009). The long-standing tradition in American politics of using television and advertisement techniques for political purposes expanded to other regions of the world where party politics was being disarticulated to give way to a personality-based politics²⁰. Also, this expansion was due to internal American politics. The ferocious competition in the political consultancy industry within the U.S pushed political consultants to seek other markets (Johnson 2009). In a time where political campaigns were increasingly more chaotic due to changing conditions, the image that “consultants’ tricks could somehow bring order out of the chaos of a campaign” (Sabato 1981:11), an image that U.S political consultants had sold internally, was in demand elsewhere.

This shift in campaigning around the world is indicative of the rise of expertise and the professionalization of politics in a late liberal, market-oriented polity (Abbott 1988; Larson 1977). The “tricks” of political consultants are a coherent set of measurable and reproducible expert techniques, a “dispassionate outlook on politics” as consultants in Colombia often describe it, used to calculate and organize political life according to economic notions of rationality (Beck 1994; Coles 2007; Mitchell 2002). Analyzing the

¹⁹ This slogan was taken from the cheer for a local soccer [football] team, America de Cali. When Barco was in Cali, someone started to yell this cheer, and the rest of the people followed. Since then, this cheer became the official campaign slogan.

²⁰ The main markets for American Political Consultancy were Latin America, Western Europe and Eastern Europe (Johnson 2009).

industry of political campaigning around the world, Plasser and Plasser (2009:3) note that, “[a]s party loyalties have eroded and electoral volatility has risen, the concept of selling politics has been gradually replaced by a political marketing approach, where the priority is to identify voter needs and to capture competitive niches in the marketplace.” The underlying assumption is that political identities are constantly in the making through consumption (Cahn 2008; Dávila 2002; Lukose 2005; Mazzarella 2003), and marketing expertise provides the tools to standardize and direct this process (Rose 1999).

In Colombia, the reformist political institutional platforms and political cultures supporting the personalization of politics provided the perfect backdrop for an U.S.-inspired political management industry to flourish. The disarticulation of political parties, the emergence of a volatile kind of voter independent from any party structure, and the personality-based networks of clientelism all share personalization as a political logic that well fit the crafting of media-oriented personality cults sponsored by the “American way” of doing politics. However, Barco’s campaign still knew that the support of different factions within the political parties, the “machineries”, were important to win an election and to be able to govern. After years of bureaucratic arrangements, political practices and agreements would not change overnight. Therefore, as Mestre remembers as their key of their success, Barco’s team defined their strategy by saying “el gobierno nacional es del partido, y el de las regions de los parlamentarios” [the national government belongs to the liberal party, the regional governments belong to congress people]. What this expression conveyed was that the central government in Bogotá would be eminently liberal while the regional governments would be mixed according to local voting outcomes. This arrangement, which reproduced the bureaucratic arrangements of a previous political era

in the distant space of the regions, allowed Barco's government to maintain good relations with the Conservative party.

The industry of political management today in Colombia continues to combine technical expertise with the skillful interaction with clientelistic networks and bureaucratic arrangements. As Miguel Silva, top Latin American consultant, claims, most of the political consultants in Colombia trained in those first years of transition have learned and mastered the ropes of technical campaigning in the market era. The specialization and professionalization of political campaigning has produced a particular ordering within campaigns. Political consultants and political strategists handle media practices while campaign managers administer the relations with local leaders and networks of favor exchange. The articulation of both of these forms of expertise wins elections, although not without some debate about what politics and its management is and should look like.

The Debate

In Colombia class segmentation continues to be reproduced as the main category to classify voters, as the main criterion used to design and mobilize electoral strategies. However, class segmentation provides a very fractured political landscape that presupposes radically different forms of political administration. In this landscape, the political and its management emerges as a contentious field, slippery to any straightforward definition.

The lack of consensus of what managing politics looks like is an ongoing conversation among political consultants in Colombia. The different experts that work on

political strategy and political marketing agree that there is still a long way to go in this field. The main complaint is the lack of research and political grounding of many political campaigns. As many political consultants agree, often campaigns are handled by advertising experts who do not take into account market research or political conditions into the design and development of a campaign. The results, as these experts claim, are very appealing advertising pieces without a clear message to transmit or a substantial view of how the political field behaves in the country. Although the idea that there is not enough research or technical expertise is a widespread notion, there is not really consensus on what political practice should look like. Depending on the side of the campaign that these different experts participate in, the answer varies. There are some who are more inclined to a marketing approach to politics while others stress the importance of understanding the distribution of power across the political board in order to adequately practice politics. Colin Rogero, an American political media consultant who worked in one of the Colombian presidential campaigns in 2010 alongside Colombian consultants, observed this fragmentation and explains it in this way:

I think probably because the United States has so many people running campaigns in every election like, our biggest kind of gift or advice we bring to the campaign is structure. We have the structure, we've got down the science (...) in the United States when you create polls you generally do that mostly by phone and the poll is as good as your sample size and you can easily increase your sample size because is easy to increase the phone calls. That is a more difficult preposition to do in Colombia because the large percentage of the voters are outside of areas that have landlines, so you can't contact them so what you have to do to get an accurate reading about what people are, is in personal interviews. It takes a long time to set the process up, a long time to do the interviews and then take a long time to readjust that research into your comprehensive plans (...) the research companies [in Colombia focus less on] political polls and

more on policy and marketing polls. So the [information] is a little difficult to get, we have to help to structure polls and then get the information we need.

Rogero's view as a foreigner practicing politics in Colombia pretty much summarizes the inner preoccupations and tensions among political consultants who work within the framework of an establishing industry. He points to three crucial elements in understanding how electoral politics is practiced in late liberal Colombia, and the issues at stake in managing public behavior. First, Rogero points to how techno-scientific approaches to politics imported from the U.S work on a limited level due to structural economic conditions. The technological platforms available, and the interactions of disciplined voters, those voters who are part of the political machine, with those platforms are very limited. The urban *voto de opinión* that is easily reached by media-oriented technologies is not an organized vote; it is rather very volatile and changing. Therefore, it is very difficult to actually take "the temperature" of elections since the thermometers available often take reads on public sentiments of those who do not participate in a predictable fashion in the voting polls. The second point is the actual face-to-face contact in actually reading political behavior in Colombia. The design of interviews and more ethnographic approaches to politics is more effective in a country where publics are not easily located in a media-oriented public sphere. The third point is how the Colombian political consultancy industry has privileged marketing approaches that sometimes do not really map out to the political dynamics of the country.

These three elements point to the fact that the question of how to conduct political behavior and "human nature" does not have a straightforward answer in Colombia. Rogero's view as an unfamiliar expert synthesizes the question that political consultants

in Colombia face every election: What should a campaign privilege, those actions targeted to stir a disciplined vote or those actions geared to mobilize the *voto de opinión*?

Political and public opinion consultants who have more of a market research orientation strongly privilege marketing techniques in order to stir politics. Gonzalo de Francisco, marketing expert and political consultant amusingly claims, “If a company sells a lot of chocolate, that is the company to make politics happen because of emotional marketing, I’m a fan of emotional marketing.” In the same vein, César Valderrama, director of one of the major public opinion research companies and director of the department of Marketing at Sergio Arboleda University, analyzes the political consultancy industry in the following way:

I believe that political marketing does not exist in Colombia. Rather, here we have some qualitative and quantitative insights provided by [basic] research and a group of political strategists that only base their work on communication practices: it’s a more advertisement-oriented industry. Marketing, which is in the middle of these two, which is the one that ties everything up and defines the strategy, doesn’t really exist.

In these definitions, politics is conceived as a mass phenomenon where individual choice can be dissected, directed and extrapolated to understand and predict how society behaves. On the other hand, there are those political consultants who see themselves more as strategists. Political strategy entails the dexterous manipulation of given conditions in order to win political power, meaning the power to represent a group of people (Bourdieu 1991). In this view, political communication and marketing practices are amply combined with personal interpretations of how political interests and political power are organized. Rational forms of measuring intertwine with the not so rational, but

very effective, political “instinct.” Camilo Rojas, a major Colombian strategist and professor of political ideas at Universidad del Rosario, has made this the center of his approach to politics. As he states:

It’s important to see how people behave but also to observe the political forces. In politics what matters is to win (...) politics is very intuitive. The [real] politician has intuition, the “feeling” [sic] to connect and manage interests. This [skill] is not technical. The strategist offers some insights [for the politician to make decisions].

This conception of political practice is attuned to what Pierre Bourdieu observed as the pairing of a habitus, meaning incorporated (made corporeal) social relations and dispositions constructed over time, and the organization and inner rules of a field for political production. For Camilo, the know-how of politics is “felt,” incorporated, rather than learnt as a mere intellectual exercise. As Bourdieu (1992: 66) describes,

[The] ‘feel for the game’ (...) [is] the almost miraculous encounter between the habitus and a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history, which makes possible the near-perfect anticipation of the future inscribed in all the different configurations on the pitch or board. Produced by experience of the game, and therefore of the objective structures within which it is played out, the ‘feel for the game’ is what gives the game a subjective sense – a meaning and a *raison d’être*, but also a direction, an orientation, an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake.

Different from techno-scientific regimes, Camilo points to politics as being a field with its own particular rules; rules that cannot be measured but that have to be felt and experienced. His view is aligned with other political consultants and politicians in Colombia who, for instance, jokingly say that when U.S political consultants arrive to Colombia they take more time figuring out that “Pennsylvania is a town in Caldas [a

region of Colombia where there is a town called Pensilvania]” than working in the election. In this joke, they ironically convey that the instruments that U.S consultants develop sometimes say little or nothing about how politics behave, and that to manage politics it is required to have an embedded knowledge, so to speak, of the context where it develops.

The discussion between the use of techno-scientific resources in politics and a more experiential approach points out to a very particular feature of late liberal politics, the intersection between epistemological rationales and political imperatives. The rational need to predict outcomes through technical instruments in an environment that is highly unstable and volatile is translated into politics in the idea of managing human will. Liberalism is supported by a permanent tension between an organizational need of states to govern the people and an ideology of personal autonomy, as David Westbrook (2004) points out. In a late liberal moment of corporate capitalism, this tension is rehashed under the guise of market and marketing practices geared to conduct individual choice (Moeran and Dewaal Malefyt 2003; Rose 1999). Choice and consumption are concepts that articulate the liberal concern for individual autonomy in a market-economy language (Appelbaum 2004; Dávila 2001; Mazzarella 2003; Miller 2010). You are what you consume, and responsible individual choices guarantee the health of the economic system, just as a responsible citizen guarantees the existence of the social contract. Often, both of these premises are used interchangeably and an apparatus of expert practices are assembled to understand, stabilize and predict individual choice both in the economic field as well as in the political field, creating available political identities ready to consume.

In this landscape, negotiations and agreements, the job of lobbyists, party brokers and middlemen—which oddly is at the core of liberal doctrine—are often seen as detrimental to democracy itself. This space is often deemed as irrational since no technique mediates the process of negotiation of self-interest; rather the raw political “instinct” of those more curtailed in politics is the key for success. The birth of this techno-scientific world of political practice has a particular historicity where liberalism has been turned inside out, bringing the administration of individual and individual choice to the limelight and relegating to the “backrooms” of political practice (Goffman 1959) the management of contractual relations and negotiations, which paradoxically is how representative regimes are constituted. In this way, what has become the meat of political competition is extremely rational but profoundly apolitical, that is the management of elections. Techno-scientific regimes guide the manufacturing of images and messages expected to conduct public emotions and therefore political choice. Electors ascribe to these images rather than having a concrete space in which to negotiate their demands and hand their power, so to speak, to their representative. Apparently, what constitutes the ideal transparent democracy contradicts its own philosophical core. How is this possible?

When politics met the market[ing]

The fluidity between politics and economics marks contemporary political practice. Looking back on the history of liberalism one can clearly observe the ongoing making process of liberalism as a modern project, a project that involves the constant articulation of politics and economics in managing “human nature.” Following Lyotard’s

(Lyotard 1984) definition, “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.” Liberalism in late liberal times, where different scales overlap, is nothing else than liberalism at its inception. Therefore the different forms political life takes are deeply liberal and deeply modern, even if following seemingly contradictory logics.

The key to understanding the fluidity and overlapping of scales that inform political management lies in the intimate intertwining of politics and economics in the liberal doctrine. In his intellectual history of the rise of capitalism in the XVII and XVIII century, Albert Hirschman (1997) explores the political and philosophical debates around the place of passions and interests in the rising market economy and incipient liberal state. As Hirschman demonstrates, self-interest—the immediate satisfaction of personal needs and the love for moneymaking—shifted radically in the moral imagination of Northwest Europe. Before the Renaissance, when the principles of our market economy were shaped, the pursuit of any form of self-interest was perceived to be sinful and undesirable. However, market economies brought the question of constancy and predictability of human actions in order for the “invisible hand,” read rationality, of the market to work. What to do with the volatile, passionate nature of human beings? How to conduct them? The art of statecraft, the Machiavellian preoccupation of “administering man as he really is” (1997: 13), became key in shaping the economic and political subject.

Interest, understood as self-love, was privileged in public discourse and political training as a way of taming the unruly passions so pervasive in the public world of men

(and women, to a certain extent). The positive valuation of self-interest, translated into making money, provided the ruling elite with a moral compass to guide society. Taking care of oneself, acting in one's best interest would result in benefits for society as a whole. As Hirschman emphasizes in complementing Weber's view on how the Protestant imperative of individual salvation became economic, "the diffusion of capitalist forms owed much to an equally desperate search for a way of *avoiding society's ruin*, permanently threatened at the time because of precarious arrangements for internal and external order" (1997: 130). The individual, the owner of passions, had to be stripped from its passionate humanity and reshaped into a being of reason in order for a capitalist society to survive. This was both an individual exercise and an exercise of the ruling elites that shaped political and economic institutions.

By the XIXth and XXth centuries, after the industrial revolution and the establishment of mass economies, the positive valuation of self-interest was revised. The disenchantment of capitalism, mostly articulated in the Marxian economic and social critique of capitalism and liberalism, shows the rising inequality among humans as evidence of the alienating force embedded in the capitalistic system.²¹ Central concepts such as class struggle, and the public emotions of "social resentment" triggered by it, brought into question the redemptive power, neutralizing character and rationality attributed to the pursuit of self-interest (Hirschman 1997). Soon, emotions were back in the spotlight as a central feature of social life, and therefore of managing politics. The question, nevertheless, was not how to repress public emotions but how to effectively stir

²¹ As Howes (Howes 2005) notes, Marx's critique on alienation went as far as to denounce the dehumanizing decoupling of the individual from her senses. In late-capitalism, the return to rich sensorial experiences, what Howes call "hyperesthesia", are the base of consumerist cultures and marketing practices.

them and conduct them. By the turn of the twentieth century, works on social psychology, such as the ones of Gustave Le Bon (Bon 2006) and Edward L. Bernays (Bernays 2004) in studying crowd behavior, became extremely influential in shaping politics. Both Le Bon's and Bernays' works became a source of inspiration to Joseph Goebbels, who is a model, although a negative one, of the emotional reaches that effective political communication may have (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 2004).

As mass liberal economy framed within the nation-state transformed into a diffuse and transnational late liberal economy, the standardization and professionalization of emotional management became a central characteristic of social and political organization. The pioneer ethnographic work of Arle Hochschild (Hochschild 1983) on the world of flight attendants provides interesting insight on how late liberal rationales shape subjectivity. In this groundbreaking work on what the author terms "emotional labor," Hoschild argues that emotional handling is central to post-industrial logics where interpersonal communication rather than human-machine relations define work. The need to manage emotions in these communicative settings corresponds to new definitions of what counts as productivity. Making the client feel good is a guiding principle in a world where human labor has been displaced from production sites to the realm of service providing.

In our contemporary world, marketing practices increasingly mediate the individual experience of reality (Applbaum 2004; Dávila 2008; Debord 1994), and the question of public emotions and the pursuit of self-interest as evidence of human rationality have found new definitions that blur any previous meanings. Scholars working on markets (Zaloom 2009), marketing (Malefyt 2009) and political communication

(Brader 2006; Marcus 2002) point to a widespread preoccupation for understanding, guiding and standardizing the emotional character of decision-making. In the industries of advertisement and political consulting, the main objective is to build an emotional “resonance” (Schwartz 1974) or connection between a product and the buyer. Different techniques have been developed in order to accomplish this goal -- for instance, the segmentation of markets according to forms of social identification as a way to appeal to ideas of self and belonging when marketing products. Increasingly, the advertisement world, including political marketing, is more concerned with crafting the emotional environments in which visual messages are delivered than crafting the messages in themselves (Moeran and Dewaal Malefyt 2003). A song, an emotional image, or the places where the messages are situated are deemed to be more powerful in conveying an idea and “striking a chord” in the public than the message itself. The crafting of emotional environments is supposed to stir political choice at the most intimate level of the self. Personal experience is the raw material that composes the messages that circulate in public environments; it is the meat for public making.

An intimate journey into the public self

Political consultants work in close association with market researchers in order to get the “temperature” of the public and therefore design and put in motion appropriate campaign strategies. Quantitative as well as qualitative techniques are used to get the picture of what people think and feel. Quantitative research, such as polls and surveys, are mostly used to scope the opinions over certain topics, while qualitative research such

as interviews, focus groups and ethnographic methods are used to observe how people act, how they feel and who they are. The objective is to observe and understand cultural configurations, mainly conceptualized as the collective unconsciousness.

In Colombia, a conglomerate of experts, who move between politics and academia (Rivas 2007), and who belong both to a political and intellectual elite, are in charge of this job. In the electoral division of labor, taking the temperature of the *voto de opinion* requires a set of techno-scientific tools and forms of expertise that are accessed through education and international networks. In the Colombian grid of class, both education and an international cosmopolitanism are closely linked to esteemed class qualities. Therefore, this realm that requires research, international partnerships for the importation of new technologies, and compliance with international standards for transparency is positively valued and associated with elite circles. In the past few years, several graduate programs in different universities have opened due to the increasing demand for political marketing as a desired career option.

In this techno-scientific environment, focus groups are one technique widely used for inquiring into the intimate realm of the political self, segmented according to demographic criteria and voting practices. The main interest of political consultants is to get representative groups of people who actually vote. In calling the participants for these sessions, the market research companies select people who are in the voting age and who normally attend the voting polls. As political consultants recognize, this population more or less maps out urban populations that belong to stratum 3 and higher, i.e. middle to upper class²². Therefore, and following the segmentation principle of contemporary

²² This selection criterion for these groups and the rationale behinds it radically contrasts with the idea that clientelistic machines, usually composed more prevalently by lower strata, are the ones who vote more.

marketing, focus groups are usually broken down into age groups, regions of sojourn and social strata, information that political consultants ask for.

At the end of one of these groups in Bogotá with young people (18-25) from stratum 3, the moderator, a clinically trained psychologist, ends the activity with an exercise to probe the archetypes of leadership lying in the collective unconscious. After three hours of work with the group, the psychologist speaks in a very mellow voice,

Let's close our eyes and relax. We're now 22 years old. Let's go to the past when we were 20, 17, 15 years old and we were in high school. Now let's go way back and peruse our memories and try to remember someone who was a leader for us. Someone that we remember for that specific characteristic, someone we remember for being a guide. Maybe it's someone we met in kindergarten, when we were kids. How did that person make us feel? What did we like about that person? The way she or he dressed? The way he or she walked? Did we have a good time with that person? (pause) Let's focus on those memories. Who was that person meaningful in our lives? What does a leader represent? Maybe it was a person who invited us to follow him or her even if it wasn't for a good purpose. Let's grab a piece of paper and let's write about the person we have in mind. Let's describe this person and say why this person is so meaningful to us that we even remember him or her today in this session.

After the group writes their memories, they deposit the sheets in envelopes for the market research firm to analyze and send a report to the political consulting firm that hired the study. Following up on this focus group session, I interviewed the leading psychologist to ask more about this qualitative methodology. With an eclectic theoretical toolbox that incorporates phenomenology, hermeneutics and social interaction approaches, the kind of focus groups and qualitative research that this psychologist has designed seeks to

However, these networks fall out of the direct scope of political consultants and are rather left to handle by campaign managers. Political consultants take into account these networks in their work but usually fall out of their direct practice. In the following section of this chapter, I will explore more this class-based division of electoral labor and its implications for political practice.

“understand human behavior, the rationality that governs this behavior and explain the reasons and emotions in how people make a choice,” as she explained.

This approach is mostly informed by current methodologies used in the field of brand marketing that basically consist in identifying the emotional connections that individuals have with specific commodities. Thus, marketing companies have developed methodologies to identify those connections to market products. For instance, a particular product can bring cherished childhood memories and those associations are capitalized by marketing companies to effectively create emotional environments in which consumers can identify themselves with products. In politics, the process is very similar, and political consultants tailor political media images and media messages according to circulating and established public perceptions. This is not to say that politicians are made to fit a particular perception. Rather, public consultants are specialized in spotting and highlighting the attributes of their candidates' personality that positively resonate with already existing perceptions. In other words, the game is not how to convince people by smashing an already existing perception but how to stir the existing perception and turn it into a positive image that will favor the candidates' popularity. This process entails spotting the emotional connections that publics have with certain issues and styles of leadership, but also digging into the particular images and notions that compose public perceptions. Focus groups are also a preferred methodology for this purpose:

Moderator: Imagine we're throwing a party and inviting the people in these images. Everyone knows the people in these pictures? Who knows this blond man? Who are these? (pause) These are the presidential candidates. Who arrives to the party first?

Man 1: Noemí [conservative party pre-candidate], because she's the only woman.

Man 2: and women are often more on time than men.

Moderator: How do you imagine they're dressed?

Woman 1: very elegantly

Man 3: with fancy dresses that show us that they are confident in themselves, that they are reliable.

Man 2: like making us believe that the deception is believable.

Moderator: Which one of these people drinks the most?

Man 3: That who looks like a drunk, he is hungover [Gustavo Petro, Leftist party candidate]

Moderator: Who drinks the least?

Woman 2: the young one, Arias [Conservative Party Pre-Candidate]

Man 1: Noemí. Generally women take care of themselves and therefore drink less.

Moderator: And with whom do we sit down to have a drink and chat for a while?

Man 3: I pick the drunk. He looks like a chill man from a dive bar [tienda]²³. He looks like he would sit next to a jukebox and throw coins in it.

²³ A *tienda* is a neighborhood's corner store where often people gather to drink and listen to music. *Tiendas* are often associated to common people and popular social environments.



Andrés Felipe Arias- votebien.com



Gustavo Petro by Laura Rico Gutiérrez de Piñeres

The scenario methodology was specifically designed for the needs of a particular campaign, and sought to understand the areas in which candidates could innovate and

distinguish themselves from the very popular President Alvaro Uribe. The idea was to explore the different associations and differences that people traced between the presidential candidates and Uribe. Although in the excerpt of this focus group this particular feature does not come up, it is interesting to highlight how the particular campaigns underscored certain characteristics that people in this particular focus group attribute to the candidates. Arias' campaign strongly associated him with Uribe and his work ethics; Petro presented himself as being close to the people, while Noemí focused her campaign on the fact of being a woman. Playing with and reinforcing individual perceptions in order to create recognizable public images is a central feature in mass communication practices.

The introduction of these particular practices in the realm of politics, and particularly democracy, raises important questions about the location of political practice in mass-market society. In the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989) observed with horror mass society and the rise of political marketing as a technology of government. In his view, the psychological and advertisement characteristics that this industry introduced as the locus for politics defeated the whole purpose of a democratic regime. The “periodic staging, when elections come around” (1989: 215), of non-ideological, consumption-oriented, massive public environments “manipulated” by private political interests, read political parties, in which citizens do not enter freely, consciously and willingly to debate are, according to Habermas, a symptom of a fragile democracy:

[I]deology accommodates itself to the form of the so-called consumer culture and fulfills, on a deeper level of consciousness, its old function,

exerting pressure toward conformity with existing conditions. This false consciousness no longer consists of an internally harmonized nexus of ideas, as did the political ideologies of the nineteenth century, but of a nexus of modes of behavior. As a system of other-directed consumption habits it takes a practical shape in the guise of a practice (1989: 214-215)

This kind of consensus formation would be more suited to the enlightened absolutism of an authoritarian welfare regime than to a democratic constitutional state committed to social rights: everything for the people, nothing by the people (1989: 219)

This depiction of undemocratic regimes under democratic form characteristic of the welfare state is close to conceptualizations of the populist impulse in mass political communication. In larger scales, where transactions lose their “face,” political exchanges get blurry. Rather than having particular demands and interests being negotiated with possible representatives, the operation resembles more the logic of populism. In this logic, a chain of particular (unfulfilled) claims and demands are aggregated into a single signifier that encompasses them all; anyone can feel identified without solving their particular concern (Laclau 2005; Panizza 2005). Overarching images and messages are crafted as the base for obtaining political support, as ready-made identities to be consumed. Thus, it is common to see in political campaigns geared to this kind of vote broad messages such as “Change,” “Hope,” “Peace,” “Prosperity” that resonate with public sentiments of frustration but do not really address any concerns in particular.

Seeing the kinds of publics that emerge through the techniques of political marketing from this light, they appear as easily manipulated crowds without political intention or any sort of will. They become some sort of hyper-publics, in Baudrillard’s (Baudrillard 1994) sense, in which liberal qualities of the public are projected and amplified over a structural reality that does not bear a close relation to their constitution.

The pristine bourgeois public sphere that Habermas imagined has no grounding in a mass-scale market economy. Therefore, consensus, individual participation, and freedom are part of these hyper-publics but in a way that is not political anymore (or not political in a narrower, class-specific, definition of the term).

The picture gets even more complicated when adding some layers of complexity: is communication a one-way process? In several interviews, political consultants stressed the fact that they did not brainwash publics but rather played with given conditions. As Alejandro Gutiérrez, a software developer who works in close association with political consultants, blatantly puts it “People are not dumb.” This idea brings to mind what several scholars working on media studies point to, the active role of audiences in shaping the actual messages circulating (Boyer 2005; Dornfeld 1996; Fairclough 1995; Martín-Barbero 2000; Warner 2002). In this view, audiences are agents (in diverse ways) in the communication process and not just mere receivers of messages; they actively signify the messages. For instance, there is no direct correlation between a propaganda piece and the individual act of voting. Political consultants hope to affect and influence political behavior, but the outcome is always uncertain. All of these techno-scientific instruments are in place to process information in seeking to stabilize and predict the terrain of human will, but without any certainty of achieving their goal.

In this sense, the hyper-public appears as a mirage of unity in an actual terrain of fracture and fluidity. The spaces in which people appropriate propaganda messages, the parallel conversations that these messages encourage, the prevalent existence of the backrooms of politics, point to the diversity of public environments that are hidden from the eye of media and advertisement publicity. To this point I will return in chapter four.

The loose relation between political communication production and reception underscores the fracture between the technologies in place to manage “human nature” and the uncertainty of “human nature,” at the level of a broad-scale market economy. This fracture makes the interplay with more stable forms of political management, read a disciplined, tied vote, an imperative that any campaign has to take into account.

The politics of interest

In Colombia, the *voto amarrado* is broadly associated with rural, anti-modern and marginal political environments. Clientelism is often problematically characterized as a deeply emotional form of political practice that blurs the private and public divide and thus escapes any form of public accountability, as the works of Auyero (2000) and Roudakova (2008) explore. It is commonly framed as belonging to “traditional” and “anti-modern” forms of political engagement where personal loyalties are mobilized in exchange for personal favors or protection in an incipient state framework (Bailey 1971; Scott 1976). However, these places take many shapes that often do not map onto economic poverty, but that do match spatial representations of peripheral and frontier areas according to an urban elite normative order.

The most striking encounter I had with this spatialization of politics occurred in my job as international coordinator for civil society electoral monitoring missions with a local NGO. The different participants, activists mostly from Europe and the U.S, frequently expressed their desire to support the local observation teams in those regions where democracy is more fragile, meaning regions where political violence and drug

traffic are most prevalent. These observers were sent to work in regions far from Bogotá, often in not very large urban environments. For those who stayed in Bogotá, I helped design a circuit that mainly focused on visiting voting polls in marginal areas of the capital, but that also included some stops in middle class and upper middle class areas. I was working and reinforcing ideas of an existing order anchored in notions of transparency and ascetic political participation that oppose notions of anti-modernity expressed in getting personal benefit from politics, intimately tied to images of the periphery.

The political constitution, understood as a renewed social contract, introduced and legitimized participatory politics as a desired form of government. The basic premise is that for political success the broad participation of “the people” in state making, government supervision and making decisions is necessary. This kind of participation presupposes a participant subject that works for the collective benefit and not for a reduced personal benefit. Thus the spaces for participation granted by the constitution should be open for public scrutiny. The creation of electoral monitoring missions, for instance, follows this constitutional mandate.

In reality, often these participatory spaces are environments in which the publicly scorned clientelism thrives. Neighborhood associations, Juntas de Acción Comunal (local community councils), trade union meetings, political parties’ meetings and any other form of participatory space is often a place in which interests, allegiances and favors are mobilized. In here, society as a whole does not participate. Rather it is the locus for small groups with particular, recognizable interests to interact and compete (Schmitt 2007). Although these spaces are more visible in lower income strata, they are present in

different social environments. These spaces are profoundly political and also commonly portrayed in public culture as profoundly immoral.²⁴ The most dramatic case is the lack of public trust in the representation organizations par excellence, Congress and the political parties. In the most recent report of Transparency International on citizens' perception of corruption, Colombia got a score of 3.4/10, being one of the mostly perceived corrupt countries in the region (Morales 2011).

Embezzlement scandals and associations with illegal groups have mostly undermined these institutions' legitimacy, and therefore I don't mean to be apologetic. But the persistent gap between what "the people" conceive to be an appropriate government and the actual practices of politics begs closer analysis. Back in the sixteenth century, Machiavelli (Machiavelli 2003) analyzed how politics and common sense morality followed different imperatives and thus could not be measured by the same standards. He sought to find an approach to explain the moral relations between politics and society by looking at the making of politics as a non-moral artifact of power (Berlin 1971). This research call still is current in the era of third way politics and civil society, a program that social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1991) has developed in his sociological vision of contemporary politics.

Bourdieu's emphasis is on the professionalization of politics. In his view, the political field has its own internal logic mastered by a few professionals who struggle with each other in seeking the monopoly on the "right of speak" for those others who are not within the political field, but who are the source of legitimacy of our representative

²⁴ In recent years, with the introduction of drug traffic moneys and paramilitarism into politics, spaces organized behind closed doors for private negotiation are publicly repudiated for bordering the lines of illegality. Also, these spaces are therefore often associated to the publicly repudiated uneducated, nouveau riche detrimental to the ideals of transparency and participation.

democratic regimes, i.e. the people. In a moment of participatory democracy in mass-scale political systems, the participatory spaces for “speaking-up” (instead of “speaking for”) intertwine with the closed environments of politics where the most skilled politicians navigate the objective conditions of the political field. Following Bourdieu (1991: 72), these spaces are “sites in which, through the competition between the agents involved in it, political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created” for a broader non-professional, non-political public to consume. These are the spaces for making agreements, for making alliances and negotiating political support. These spaces presuppose other forms of conducting “human nature,” not anchored in conducting public emotionality, but rather in conducting and managing interest and sentiments of loyalty in order to produce the basic outline in which politics will behave. These are the spaces in which the people who are in the business of politics interact, they are smaller scale face-to-face spaces in which to negotiate interest, and therefore require a great deal of political instinct.

A month before the Congress Election in Colombia, Nicolás,²⁵ a political strategist with whom I had been working, took me to interview Raúl, the “Leader Coordinator” for one of the congress candidates he was managing. I could not quite understand the mechanics of electoral campaigning in a country that publicly recognized the division between two kinds of votes. The purpose of this meeting was for me to get a better grasp of how the division of electoral labor works.

Raúl was in charge of negotiating political support for the candidate among local and civic leaders responsible for mobilizing their communities to vote. Nicolás wanted

²⁵ The names of the people in this section have been changed according to confidentiality requests.

me to see for myself what politics was *really* about, and the best person to show me was the man who had to negotiate the political support for the candidate amongst social and political groups of all sorts. We arrived at the political headquarters of the congressional candidate, a house in the British style located in a middle-class neighborhood in Bogotá. The space was filled with photos of the candidate in all sorts of situations: photos of him posing for political publicity pieces, photos of him delivering a speech in a public setting, and photos where he appeared dancing with women from the municipalities and localities he works with. There were almost as many photos as there were small corridors and locked doors. Behind one of those doors was Raúl, and before his door was a line of “local leaders” who had been waiting for their turn to speak with him. We waited for some minutes until he made a slot in his busy agenda. He took us to a more private room located on the second floor of the house.

“What Nicolás does is virtual politics,” Raúl said as he stared at him. “*What I do is real politics.*” As he continued to explain, virtual politics is the expression of politics in media: the management of communication strategies targeted to steer public opinion, the opinion of those voters who do not have a direct interest in politics. On the contrary, he continued, *real politics* is the negotiation with local leaders who in exchange for a benefit for themselves and for their communities organize their constituencies to vote for a certain politician. This job requires instinct and political savvy, skills honed through experience and an intimate knowledge of what people want. Raúl emphasized that in this business he had to learn how to tell apart whom to trust and whom not to trust. As he put it, it was a matter of reading “the vibes” that one gets from people, and the only way to get this skill is by spending time in those places where people are getting something out

of politics, often economically marginal environments. “I sometimes let the people touch my buttocks, I listen to them. People just want to be heard” Raúl said.

Although this description of politics might seem a little esoteric, it points to central characteristics of what constitutes a political space. For starters, liberal politics entails antagonism among parties. At the level of mass politics and media practices, this antagonism of interests is not relevant since the industry seeks to build generalities that a broad portion of the population can identify with (Mouffe 2000). Second, the political field requires a sort of knowledge and administration that is contrary to techno-scientific regimes; it requires a “practical sense” of how to interpret political moves:

This 'practical sense' of the possible and impossible, probable and improbable stances for the different occupants of different positions is what enables the politician to 'choose' suitable and agreed stances (...) This feel for the political game, which enables politicians to predict the stances of other politicians, is also what makes them predictable for other politicians: predictable and thus responsible, in other words, competent, serious, trustworthy—in short ready to play, with consistency and without arousing surprise or disappointing people's expectations, the role assigned to them by the structure of the space of the game (Bourdieu 1991: 179).

The stability of the conditions given and knowing how to anticipate how other people in the political field will act and react is what gives this space the stability that a mass environment does not guarantee, and thus makes it appealing as a simultaneous setting for political practice. Getting a “feel” for or understanding “the vibes” entails understanding how political power is distributed and how the key actors in that field are positioned in relation to one another. In this sense, these political spaces are smaller environments in which the unpredictable character of “human nature” is managed through face-to-face negotiations. In these negotiations, both interest and sentiments of

loyalty play a crucial role. Sentiments of allegiance and gratitude interact with rationality broadly defined, as calculating what is more beneficial. Political managers and local leaders capitalize on both of these forms of interaction to mobilize the *voto amarrado*.

Raúl invited me to see what his job was about. I followed him and the politician he worked for around poor areas of Bogotá. The first stop was in a neighborhood categorized as stratum 1, a neighborhood that had started as an illegal urbanization in the fringes of the city. A meeting was happening in the middle of the street. There was a construction truck that served as an improvised stage. On the stage was the local leader who had organized the meeting, a mariachi band and a powerful sound system. The houses surrounding the political setting were covered in political propaganda. In front of the truck, campaign promoters (cheerleaders hired for the occasion) danced in the middle of a half-drunken crowd. “Un aguardientico? Una gaseosita?”²⁶, promoters offered as they walked around the crowd.

²⁶ Aguardiente is the popular alcoholic drink of Colombia made of sugar cane. “Gaseosa” [Gassy] is the popular name given to carbonated drinks.



Political Meeting-Personal Archive

The leader in charge of organizing the meeting delivered a heartfelt speech: “Today we are gathered to support the son of the council man that we have traditionally supported in this neighborhood, El Gordo²⁷. He worked for the strata 1 and 2 to bring you paved roads and the aqueduct. Politicians often remember us just to ask for votes but not to work for the people. We are very grateful to this political family. More *gaseosita* for the people, please!” After, the promoters stood on the stage with a banner-sized print of the ballot for congress. The promoters cheered: “whom do we vote for, for the house of representatives?” the crowd cheered the reply, “and whom for the senate?” the crowd also replied excitedly. They repeated the exercise several times, as a way for the attendants to

²⁷ In Colombia, the use of physical traits as nicknames that express affection and proximity are very common. Usually, these expressions are used among friends and family expressing the intimacy of the parts involved. The use of this kind of nickname to refer to a political representative elicits the close relations sought within the political machine.

memorize what to do when at the voting polls, and then invited the attendants to dance and drink to the mariachi music.

Although this account might be a political anecdote expected to happen in marginal areas of any country, the recurrence of this way of political management in face-to-face environments invites the researcher to stop and look more carefully at the assumptions at stake when observing a phenomenon as quotidian and yet as foreign as politics. Independent from objective economic conditions, people who work within politics and who move in these small scale environments rehash the liberal principles of the negotiation of interest and the creation of alliances as a form of political administration.

I accompanied Nicolás to meet with one of the key men of the Governor of a region of Colombia who had recently been involved in a corruption scandal, and whose political future was hanging from a thin string. We met at the lobby of a hotel in the north of Bogotá, where this man, Mr. D, came to greet us with the governor and a congress man part of his political structure. In our meeting, Mr. D offered me some “tapes” that he had involving his political opponents in another corruption scandal. For some reason, and maybe because of the fact that “anthropology” rarely rings a bell, he thought that my research was some sort of investigative report that would help him get out in the media this information to expose his political opponents. When I told him I was not interested, he was surprised, and the conversation shifted to the point of the meeting: for Nicolás to get more information on another candidate. As Nicolás later explained, Mr. D knows what is boiling beneath the surface, he knows how politicians move, and he is an excellent source for political information. He is also a “shady” character who by means

of handling sensitive information in strategic ways, by exchanging favors and having people owe him, negotiates and gets what he wants out of different situations. To me it sounded like blackmailing. Nicolás laughed at my righteousness, “that’s politics,” he said. As he ironically conveyed, “In the U.S political consultants get sensitive information about opposing candidates and launch negative publicity ads and here everyone admires them. In Colombia, negative publicity is illegal and it’s done under the table. And when it’s done here, everyone points out fingers in indignation to how unethical it is. Politics is politics everywhere!”

These two accounts of how political structures are assembled and mobilized in different economic strata point to the inner professionalization logic of the political field, a topic that theorists committed to understanding the modern state have so many times visited (Latour 2010; Weber 1968). Although these stories look like another iteration of patronage politics contrary to our very modern understanding of professionalization, when seen in closer sociological detail they emerge as closed political environments that follow a particular set of rules and parameters of legitimacy. Rhetoric devices, senses of historic allegiance and gratitude, as well as favor exchange are strategically mobilized in a network for problem solving where loyalties and affections circulate. In these networks, the functions of the state take the face of particular individuals, a characteristic trait of modern bureaucracies and political organizations (Gupta 1995; Hull 2003). In these closed spaces, as was explored earlier in this chapter, knowing how agents move and anticipating these moves is crucial to the objective of politics, which is maintaining representative power. This skill is cultivated through experience rather than through education, and experience is regarded within the political field with great esteem. Often,

when electing public officers we are more interested in knowing the track record of the politician of choice than his academic titles. Experience and “feeling the vibes,” having the right instinct, are the source of legitimacy of a professional field that, in our highly techno-scientific world, is often demonized and closed to any scrutiny. However, the political still exists, it’s more alive than ever, posing complicated questions for how public life unfolds.

Chapter 4

Strategic Public Worlds

Publicity is one of the main features of electoral politics. For a candidate to win votes, an electing constituency must know who the candidate is. It doesn't matter what kind of reputation the candidate has, that's what political managers and public relations experts are there for, what matters is that people know him or her. The cliché premise "there's no such thing as bad publicity" that celebrities often use to justify scandalous behavior is an axiomatic principle in electoral politics. Therefore, in every political campaign, the management of publicity is carefully crafted. Some campaigns are built to enhance the public recognition of a candidate who is just starting a political career and does not aspire to immediate election; some other campaigns are devoted to managing and capitalizing on the already existing public reputation of seasoned politicians. The role of political managers, particularly political strategists, is to steer the public recognition of a candidate by assessing who the candidate's constituency is and designing a communication and campaign strategy accordingly.

In Colombia, political strategists assess communication strategies according to the logic of segmentation. As has been explored in the previous chapters, segmentation is culturally coded as a problem of class ordering, and it works as an interpretative lens to understand society and "human nature" by coupling liberal economic and political rationales. In this way, as treated in previous sections, segmentation according to class is the organizing principle framing political epistemologies and the division of electoral labor in Colombia.

In the context of electoral competition and political participation, this class-based mode of segmentation results in class-specific publics with particular forms and rules for participation. In this chapter, I examine how class-based notions of the polity inform different communication strategies, the media they use, and the kinds of publics they give shape to. I argue that in these spaces particular networks assemble to strategically mobilize politics, and I call into question the operability of a public/private distinction based on the liberal conception of deliberative democratic politics.

I frame the design of different communication strategies as a particular way of “world making” (Goodman 2001) where participation is reaffirmed as a universal principle but also “styled” (Ossman 2002) as a particular class-based experience. I see political strategists as makers of politics who work with objects such as tangible messages, networks and platforms of communication in order to compose different worlds where political experience is different. In doing so, I distance myself from a definition of politics as a merely representational regime and rather focus on the *matter of politics*, “the lively materiality of technological objects within the collectivities in which we live in” (Braun and Whatmore 2010: xi), and ethnographically observe how these technologies are at the same time constitutive of our collective life (Latour and Weibel 2005; MacKenzie 2002).

The chapter is structured in two sections. The first section looks at the production of synchronicity of media in constituting an all-encompassing national conversation during elections. I trace how the technologies, networks and practices at work in configuring a national agenda of public debate intertwine with bourgeois liberal notions of individual and collective freedom. In the second part, I frame clientelistic politics as a

form of strategic politics mobilized by groups portrayed as “in need” to access the slippery state apparatus. I focus on privatized forms of communication that reinforce loyalty, intimacy and proximity as a legitimate form of government, in a time of privatized state services. I finish the chapter by showing some ways in which strategic politics has been paired up with mass media communication to create highly effective communication formats for governing that in complicated ways conjoin bourgeois liberal notions with strategic politics.

PART 1

The problem of synchronicity or the making of the bourgeois public sphere

In Colombia, during elections, heated arguments at the family’s dinner table, among friends in a bar, tears, yelling, and loud laughter are not at all uncommon. On the contrary, they are the format of informal political discussions. Many times, I found myself in these social settings hiding my political preferences to avoid piercing glances, or the interminable arguments that often ended when someone abruptly left the room in a sign of indignation. I also avoided talking too much about my fieldwork, and I kept my tagline as vague as I could make it, so I wouldn’t hurt any susceptibilities or provoke one of these never ending epic battles. However, sometimes plunging into the deepest pools of political affectivity and melodramatic performance, much in accordance with

Colombia's telenovela tradition,²⁸ was inevitable. These moments contrasted the dispassionate and cynical outlooks of my informants, and provided a window to look at the ways in which the work of political strategists and political managers become part of everyday public and private life.

During electoral times, national and local media, social networks, public meetings and every conversation in cafés or private gatherings somehow arrive at the latest news in the electoral competition. Poll numbers intertwine with personal preferences; discussions about the future of the nation intersect with gossip about candidates, their personal lives or their political trajectory. Everyone becomes a political pundit, and even the most politically skeptical are drawn into this overwhelming synchronicity of topics. Personal emotions intersect with public issues in a dance that brings together intimate sentiments with the political news of the day. In political thought, the theorization of these spaces in which private citizens engage in public discourse and mobilize it has been theorized as the public sphere. The liberal idea of an existing civil society that oversees government has been usually framed as an actually existing space, natural to any democratic setting. However, most evidently in contemporary, media-centered politics than ever before, these spaces are created, managed and mobilized by experts in political communication, who reproduce normative notions of what participating in democracy looks like. In this first part, I focus on how “anonymity”- based media, such as social media, TV, and

²⁸ Omar Rincón, Colombian media scholar expert in Latin American political communication, sees that the format of the Telenovela is also very used by politicians as an effective tool to deliver political messages. “What these individuals [televisual presidents and governments] recover is people's common, on the ground knowledge; they coin idiomatic expressions, as well as narratives and media aesthetics (...) In Latin America the success of political communication as a form of government can be better understood if framed by the logics of Telenovela and melodrama and not classical politics. These “lads” are melodramatic heroes who come to save the mistaken people, the people who have chose the wrong presidents, the wrong governments.” (Interview with Omar Rincón).

advertisement, are fashioned as the locus where normative ideas of citizenship and participation are evoked and reaffirmed as an actual existing reality. And since constituted as a normative horizon, it seems inescapable and omnipresent; it is constituted as the framework of reference for all politics.

The all-encompassing, engulfing nature of normative ideas of participation is mostly felt during elections. The synchronicity of topics, spaces, and conversations is brought together by the strong gravitational pull created when all media engage in one single conversation, because it's electoral times --that's what's current, and that's what every citizen ought to be interested in. I felt this stifling environment of elections in my fieldwork. I started dreading electoral politics to the bone. I was tired of being asked over and over again about what I was finding or being treated as some sort of political expert. I was tired of talking endlessly about politics. Some days I just wanted to hang out, listen to music and forget that an election was going on and that I was doing fieldwork in this setting. But still politics came up in the conversations with my most intimate group of friends, and here, there was no place to hide, no excuse to give. One of these moments was with one of my closest friends. She wanted my opinion on whom to vote for for Congress. "I'm not going to vote," I replied. "Learning what I've learned about the manufacturing of politics so far with my fieldwork, I feel like voting is not that useful." Unexpectedly, she burst into inconsolable tears, "You have to vote, if it's not us, who's going to change things?" Jaded by exhaustion I had turned into an utter cynic. And for me, my vote was not a big deal; in my eyes nothing would change if I voted or I didn't. But for my friend, voting, participating, was a matter of changing the world.

The intrusion of public affairs in intimate conversations, or the deeply entrenched understandings of personal actions as affecting the collective are in dialogue with a liberal conception of the polity. Liberal notions of public forming such as Benedict Anderson's concept of "seriality" (Anderson 1998,1999) or Jurgen Habermas' "Public sphere" (Habermas 1989) hinge upon the idea that anonymous subjects are engaged and synchronized in a collective project of state-making, greater than them, while highlighting the importance of individual actions in putting this project in motion. Both Anderson's and Habermas' projects elaborate on the Kantian concept of cosmopolitanism: both projects explore the ways in which the exercise of rational freedom stands in a dialogic relation with the creation of one world, a cohesive ontological, systematic unit, where universal citizenship is possible, varying in modes but not in kind.

In Benedict Anderson's "homogenous, empty time" of unbounded seriality, citizens enter and create one world, united by a shared sense of politics recreated by reading the daily news, by engaging in one language that is intelligible to all. News-making creates "grammars of representation," ideas and concepts that circulate at the same time and that are iterated in different contexts reaffirming their currency. These "grammars of representation" provide the blueprint for the conversations worth having, the concepts worth imagining, discussing and fighting for. But foremost, as Anderson argues, news-making synchronizes time and the world by presenting events as if they happened at the same time and at the same level of reality. In this play of production, circulation and appropriation a world as a whole emerges, even if those participating in

these conversations do not agree with what is being said, or even if they access it from different entry points.

This idea of the liberal polity is very close to Habermas' notion of the bourgeois public sphere. For Habermas associations of private citizens come together around issues that are of common interest, hence becoming public issues. These citizens have equal access to the debate of these issues, since they affect them all, and since they share the same communicative rationality that makes the debate intelligible to all. Concerning this last point, Habermas would later elaborate on this enabling backstage of political communication, which he calls "lifeworld" and defines as a correlate of intersubjective processes of understanding, open to "subjects who make use of their competence to speak and act" (Habermas 1984:112). What this means, bluntly put, is that people who understand (and therefore experience) the world in similar terms are able to communicate, reach agreement and coordinate actions.

Scholars across disciplines have extensively critiqued this conception of the liberal polity and political participation for overshadowing power relations and forms of domination, and for taking for granted that we all inhabit indeed the same world of politics where public spheres exist (e.g Fraser 1990; Warner 2002; Weintraub and Kumar 1997). I will explore deeper some of these critiques in the next section of this chapter. But, for now, I want to focus on the productive aspects that Anderson and Habermas offer to understand the formation, circulation and establishment of a hegemonic political discourse. In both of their works, they place their attention at the inception of the bourgeois state from the point of view of the bourgeoisie or the elites in the new

nations,²⁹ thus exploring how the “grammars of representation,” to borrow Anderson’s term, are formed and what they look like.

The bourgeois state is the state of a market economy where rational, anonymous individuals participate in a rational system that corrects any behaviors that threaten its reproduction. Legal and political systems developed both to secure a rational functioning, expressed in anonymous, segmented and specialized bureaucracies that guaranteed equal access and equal regulation to every citizen participant in the system. In this system, as Habermas and Anderson explore, media and publicity play a crucial role for this rational anonymity to become the glue of sociality. Both thinkers highlight the role print media had in creating a shared sense of inhabiting and taking part in the same world. They also make the case that there is an intimate relation between the production of capital, the formation of political and economic interests, and the production of a space (the public sphere) where citizens who have a direct interest in the legal and political regulations of the market economy can express their voice. This space guarantees the regulation of state operations in relation to private interests, and is established as the “appropriate” and desired space for civil society (private citizens) within a nation-state with a market economy to exist. By focusing on the producers who mobilize these channels for civil society to become a tangible reality, both Habermas and Anderson reinforce the Gramscian notion that “[t]he bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level” (Gramsci 2009: 79).

²⁹ The elites in many of the new nations of the early 19th century cannot be considered properly bourgeois. They share the elite position but not the objective conditions that gave rise to the bourgeoisie in Europe. In the new nations, the elites deployed connections to European nobility, based their wealth and power in inheritance and extensive land ownership, conditions that harshly contrast the entrepreneurial spirit characteristic of the bourgeois, the bourgeois revolutions and the establishment of liberal politics.

Hobbesian Cybernetics

The idea of a media-centered public sphere as the appropriate space for civil society to express its will and for anonymous individuals to exercise their rational will in the best interest of the common good is deeply rooted in Colombian public culture. Political managers and people within the political field in general often map out the ideal voting practice of the *voto de opinión* (explored in detail in chapter two) onto the spaces of print media and digital media, and to a certain extent, to television and highly visible public gatherings. It is generally accepted that these media-centered public spaces are the “natural” locus for the *voto de opinión* and their architecture is crafted to promote and enhance the democratic ideals this kind of vote stands for.

However, before we get into the particular forms of these spaces and their relation to the ideas they promote, it is necessary to clarify the scale at which they operate, and in this sense, the scope of sociality that they enclose, the world they constitute. Media studies scholars have diagnosed the shrinking, multiplicity and volatile nature of publics in the era of rapid and individualized information exchange (Boyer Forthcoming; Warner 2002). Cell phones, social media, and bloggers have constituted disrupted networks of information that contrast the broadcasting model that was prevalent during the twentieth century. However, during elections, it appears that all media take part in the same conversation, and in this sense they are aligned as belonging to a same conversation, to the same plane of reality, to the same world. As Nelson Goodman explores (2001:5), world-making entails “the analytic study of types and functions of symbols and symbols

systems.” Every world that we make is a version of the one world we have, but in each particular world we create we isolate or highlight different elements. Every version we make is functionally distinct and, in this way it constitutes a world in itself. To unveil what Goodman means, we can think of reality as an entanglement of threads connected and disconnected in many ways. When we carry out analytic operations in an attempt to organize the mess and make it intelligible, we are pulling out threads from the original entangled knot. Each thread is functionally distinct, and in this sense, each thread frames reality in different ways. What happens within what is encompassed in one thread may not happen the same way, or may be absurd, in what is encompassed in another one.

This world-making approach is productive in thinking about public-making because it elucidates the question of scale. As was discussed in the previous section, when engaging with public formation at a normative level, we find ourselves in the land where authors in hegemonic positions produce universals. Here, the production of shared normative meanings functionally reproduces a broader moral frame. The spaces created as the “home” of the *voto de opinión* are “normative spaces” (Hirschkind 2001) where political virtue and democratic ideals are reaffirmed. Within them, individuals invest themselves in producing cosmopolitan senses of belonging that give shape to the national, the international, and the cosmic as felt and real political spaces, as material realities shaped by specific information networks and by specific information practices.

Norbey Quevedo, a prominent political journalist of *El Espectador*, one of the main newspapers in Colombia, explained from the point of view of a journalist how the synchronous, media-centered public sphere is produced during electoral times:

I believe a main characteristic of journalism is its sense of immediacy and urgency [*coyuntura*]. In media, as in any other business, we have a daily scheduling of activities as well as an annual agenda. In January of this year [2010], we already knew it would be an electoral year and hence all media, even all of the sections of the printed newspaper and the online version were aligned to fulfill the readers' expectations about the information on elections. In that sense, all of us journalists take the time from our regular schedule to cover politics (...) This [creation of synchronicity] conforms to an environment in which communications strategists and political consultants play a central role, and therefore a *communication circle* is formed where four main actors intervene: *some* strategists, *some* political candidates, *some* media and *some* journalists" [italics are mine].

Quevedo has been working as a political journalist for many years, and he is an experienced journalist in these matters. In the excerpt of the interview above, he hints at the "situatedness" and authoritative character of public making. The *communication circle*, setting a national agenda, and determining what people will talk about, is a very fine interplay between political and economic interests -- what will sell-- and the ethical imperative of journalism of acting as society's critical voice. His interview evinces how *some* actors with *some* interests and *some* ways of looking at the world produce an all-encompassing national conversation in which they narrate what the nation is and what it should be. This intimate relation between newsmaking, knowledge making and politics making is not at all foreign to Colombia's history. Rather there are many examples throughout Colombia's republican history where intellectual circles comprising artists, politicians, journalists and businessmen have marked the country's political imagination, the production of a shared sense of a real nation, and sometimes its fate.³⁰

³⁰ Circles as Los Leopardos in the 1920s, El Círculo de Barranquilla where Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Mario Santodomingo (the wealthiest man in Colombia) took part, and La Revista Alternativa in the 70s owned by Enrique Santos, journalist and part of Juan Manuel Santos' prominent political family, are some examples.

The intellectual histories that look at these circles in Colombia show common threads on how authoritative voices are constituted, threads that continue to be important to this day in marking the desired formats for a national, public conversational home of the opinion vote (Arias 2007; Jaramillo Uribe 1977; Rivas 2007). Authors at different moments in time reinforce ideals and norms that transcend their own particular authority, as some sort of “transcendental anonymity” (Foucault 2003) at work. In the particular case of Colombian republican life, these norms constitute and define the appropriate formats to participate in a national political conversation and are anchored within class specific ideas of what republican life is. Nevertheless, even though this “transcendental anonymity” is situated, the axioms that it reinforces appear to be universal and timeless. The praise of print media, rhetoric, and a cosmopolitan outlook that brings the “world” to the local lived space are the parameters that these groups reinforce through time (see chapter two). In contemporary Colombia, these ideals have been transposed to the world of the Internet. And during the elections of 2010 where campaigning on the Internet became a key player in managing the *voto de opinión*, ideals about anonymous and critical engagements, about the exercise of individual’s rational freedom in stirring the future of the nation, are rehashed in a synchronous dance that produces a very real national scale.

In his exploration of the emergence of digital newsmaking and its relation to late liberal logics, Dominic Boyer remarks the adaptability of liberalism while maintaining a distinct epistemological core. In Boyer’s words (in press: 260-261), in its different iterations liberalism retains the “valorization of individual freedom, the celebration of seemingly autonomous and self-generative individuality that Beth Povinelli has aptly

termed ‘autological.’ Liberalism’s most fundamental epistemic operation is to foreground the experiential fact that to some extent we can always believe ourselves to be unrelated beings, encountering the world ‘out there’ through individualized senses, ideas and bodies that are to a significant degree self-sovereign.” The Internet and its digital socialities fit, feed and reinforce this “epistemic operation” of liberalism by respecting and promoting individuality within the generation of a productive network. Individual stations constitute a web, and these individuals are anonymous to one another but working together in the maintenance and reproduction of the web in which they are embedded, the sovereign web on which every individual is dependent. It is Hobbes’ wildest dream come-true, a cybernetic, quasi-psychedelic Leviathan. And it is no surprise that republican ideas get rehashed in association with digital practices, as liberal sociality is also embedded in these phantasmagoric fantasies where invisible hands, collective unconsciousness, and national imaginations work as the glue for collectivities.

This liberal political subjectivity in its later iterations was evident in how campaigning on the Internet was conceived in Colombia. During the 2010 Presidential elections, for the first time in Colombian politics web-based social media and online news became very important players in the political game. Antanas Mockus’ campaign, especially, relied heavily on Internet-based media to reach his supporters, and the expectations this new campaign strategy generated among the Colombian public showed the power of these tools for electoral politics. The use of Facebook and Twitter to organize and coordinate public gatherings, or to circulate publicity pieces made by citizens who wanted to contribute to the campaign, played with a widespread notion among Internet users: the internet is free and is a tool for the people to express their will

(Coleman 2001; Kelty 2008; Trippi 2008). This notion fit perfectly Mockus' campaign, which was aimed at promoting a culture of transparency, legality and civic government control, a program of civility and individual discipline à la 21st century. And the strategy on the Internet was coherent with this view of the polity. It was conceived as the place where those Colombians who were outside politics, who did not believe in traditional politics, and who were willing to participate uninterestedly in politics found a space for their voices to be heard. And these Colombians, to which the campaign catered, were mainly middle and upper-middle educated, urban sectors, the ones who have Internet access.³¹

In Colombia, being savvy on the Internet is understood to be the same as being current and global. The Internet provides information that otherwise cannot be found, and is conceived to be the space where wealthy and powerful moguls cannot reach. The meanings that in Colombia are ascribed to the Internet, and that were especially circulating during the presidential campaign of 2010 in relation to Mockus' campaign, played on what Morozov (2012) calls "cyber-utopias," the blind faith that the higher connectivity that the Internet brings, results in the effective actualization of democracy.

For the elections of 2010, the Internet represented a promise of liberation from the long-standing structures of power of the country. Catalina Lobo-Guerrero, director of Votebien.com, a web-site sponsored by the largest media conglomerates of the country meant to provide electoral information to citizens, felt that the fact that the news outlet she ran was on the Internet provided her with more freedom. She did not feel any pressure to comply with the secret political agenda of media moguls or to be tied to any

³¹ According to the World Bank data, 36.5 Colombians out of 100 have Internet access (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2>).

particular ideology. She felt her webpage was marginal since it did not draw as much attention as the main media that Colombians pay attention to (radio and TV), but it was relevant since key opinion makers would mention it in their columns or radio shows to provide facts. As she put it: “Votebien is not behind making a few bucks with its rating; rather [votebien] is on the side of the citizen, therefore we don’t sell empty contents, empty images.” On the contrary, she saw herself as exercising the job of a reporter, of shedding light on the dark world of politics, and the unregulated character of Internet allowed her to do so. The Internet was a place in which real journalism could be practiced, a place in which the interests of the powerful would not reach.

Similarly to Catalina, Ana Piñeres, a TV and film producer, fervent and devoted follower of Mockus, found an empowering source in the Internet. Along with some actors and TV people, she produced a political spot for Mockus where faces well known to the Colombian TV viewers shared why they supported Mockus. The format was very similar to Obama’s spot featuring Scarlett Johansen or to Mexico’s campaign to allure younger voters, “Rock the vote”.³² Like many other publicity pieces in the Mockus campaign, this was a citizen initiative, and it ran independently from the campaign. As Ana remembers with sparks in her eyes about the process of shooting and publicizing the spot,

This was a process from the heart that started because many friends in our group who are on Facebook, we started to see that we converged on things that we posted. Someone posted an article about Mockus and everyone else commented on it. We started talking with Juan Sebastian Aragón, his wife and other of our friends and we said “we must do something.” Sometimes we lend our faces for money to promote a moisturizing cream, or give our testimonials to promote the TV y Novelas awards and that makes the awards stand out, why not support somebody who we are

³² Both Obama’s 2008 campaign spot and Rock the Vote show hip young celebrities supporting a political cause and a candidate.

convinced can deliver the country that we dream about? (...) so we started calling people, and the day when we were shooting, more people than we were expecting arrived. It was endearing because everyone who arrived knew there were many people on the set, so one arrived with a cheese board, another one arrived with a bag of cheetos, the other one with *bocadillos*. It suddenly turned into a gathering of friends who had not seen each other for a long time. And it was amazing, a beautiful energy was flowing, nothing was preconceived, everything was about people talking from their hearts. It was like four, three, two, one and as they saw the red light bulb turn on, the green light bulb also came on³³ and they [spontaneously] said why they wanted to vote for him [Antanas] (...) I was in charge of uploading the video to the Internet. I had messages on my Blackberry all day long, every day. The first two days my phone went out of service because I got around 2500 messages of people thanking us, messages saying how wonderful the spot turned out to be. People in media [media-makers] messaged me, I've found that most people in media are with Antanas, the *thinking people* [la gente pensante], column writers. Everyone we sent the spot linked us immediately, after 25 minutes of uploading the spot, *Semana*, *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *City TV*³⁴ and *El Mundo* in Spain had it on their webpages (...) I get goose bumps because this is the first time that I'm living an electoral process where I feel I'm actually participating, and where I feel I can be myself. I can be a transparent, legal, clean, person who pays taxes, who owns her own company and who is working to be better and doesn't trick the country. At last there's someone that I sympathize with, someone who thinks like I do.

Catalina and Ana come from different sides but convey a similar sense of how the Internet works in relation to political processes. Catalina, the responsible journalist with a strong ethical stance on journalism and politics, and Ana, the ethical political activist with access to media networks, highlight the openness and transparency that the Internet brings for citizens to make informed decisions. In the Internet, citizens can find “uncontrolled” and “unaltered” information. They can access different voices. By the same token, the Internet is also a medium for citizens to express their voice freely. And in this sense, it is a place for the exercise of critical thought as the exercise of positive

³³ The red light bulb is the indicator that cameras are rolling. The green light bulb is an allusion to the Green Party.

³⁴ These are the main political magazine, the main newspapers and a very well known TV station based in Bogotá.

freedom for the realization of real participation and of a real democracy, as the story told by Ana conveyed. This positive freedom, in Sir Isaiah Berlin's words (1990:161), is the one where the self is her own master, a late-liberal sense of freedom prevalent since WWII:

I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them.

However, like any technology and as Morozov (2012) points out, the Internet is also highly regulated and rather than being a place where libertarian dreams are actualized, it is a place where power differentials, questions of access and democratic practices manifest themselves in different ways. The Internet has developers, experts, institutions and companies that mediate its uses. And this highly mediated nature of this environment is most clear when observing political campaigning on the Internet. As both Catalina and Ana highlight, the role of networks of opinion-makers in making their work nationally relevant is fundamental. The Internet enables the access to the national and the international realms, but it is key opinion-makers who make these scales real and tangible. In the case of Catalina, the opinion-makers who regularly consult Votebien.com for the facts and comment about it in their own media validate the information of a news outlet that is immersed in an overwhelming ocean of information and news production (Boyer in press). For Ana, being part of a group of people who shared the notoriety of television making and also having access to a data base where she could spread her information guaranteed the success and viral nature of the Mockus spot she helped

produce. This fact points to the less visible aspect of media work: its management. But, during elections, these highly managed environments surface, debunking any libertarian fantasies about absolute individual freedom and self-actualization enabled online.

Circles made into working networks: When political managers and political consultants step in

The importance of networks and the deliberate production of synchronicity to produce a national agenda are more evident when looking at the media practices of political managers during elections. Although from an “emic” perspective, political managers and citizens on the Internet are different, from an “etic” perspective they share a fundamental similarity: to be relevant they must navigate certain networks. Let me explain. Ana and Catalina recognize themselves to be completely different from political managers, they are transparent, they are not pushing a secret agenda, and the Internet helps them to do so. On the contrary, the business of political managers is to work within the networks of power and stir them. And this stirring is many times hidden from the public eye. However, from an etic perspective, the work of political managers is also embedded in particular networks of opinion making geared to stir what they conceive as the *voto de opinión*. From the perspective of managers, the Internet, TV spots and the relation with print and radio are part of the same package. And they have devised different techniques to manage these media, techniques that constitute expert practices in the business of public relations. However, even though managed, the ways that political consultants and political managers direct and conceive of the spaces for the *voto de*

opinión is in dialogue with the notions outlined above. In their practice, it is possible to observe the networks and action at play in producing synchronicity and an all-encompassing national conversation.

Edward Bernays (2004: 7), father of public relations, described this field as “a vital tool of adjustment, interpretation and integration between individuals, groups and society.” This alignment of sociality that Bernays describes is still one of political management’s main goals. As seen in chapter three, understanding and directing public perception on different issues or about a candidate is the meat and potatoes of the business of political management, especially when situated in managing the media-centered *voto de opinión*. Therefore, stirring and producing a national conversation by spreading a “disciplined message,” meaning a consistent message, among different media, lies at the center of the media practices of political consultants. In doing so, political consultants hope to set the agenda, the ongoing national conversation that will positively impact the campaign that they are managing. And for this to happen, their techniques are organized in a quasi-military discipline.

Santos’ campaign was directed in this way. The day after Juan Manuel Santos won the presidency, I met with J.J Rendón, his chief political strategist, in a restaurant in the north of Bogotá. He celebrated victory with a glass of wine, and with the enormous satisfaction of having delivered in spite of all the negative publicity that surrounded his arrival to the campaign.³⁵ He explained how he achieved victory, “When I arrived to Santos’ campaign I organized it, as Roman Generals organized their Legions.” What he meant was that, contrary to the Mockus campaign which was powered by the force of a

³⁵ J.J Rendón is considered an expert stirrer of negative publicity. When he arrived to the country to work in Santos’ campaigns, different political circles criticized his arrival since they saw it as “dirty play.”

mob of enthusiasts and followers with little strategic directive, Santos' campaigned aligned in a disciplined fashion media and political forces in order to stir and work within the established networks of power. Rendón made sure that the political forces in place, "the political machine," the army of voters mobilized by particular political figures, was disciplined and synchronized, as he also made sure that the message they were spreading across different media was organized and "disciplined."

For this purpose, his first action as chief political strategist was to change the colors of the campaign, from the initial orange and white to the colors of the Partido de la U, the political party of President Alvaro Uribe, which was supporting Santos' candidacy. Although changing the campaign colors may seem like an innocent move at first glance, in fact it was a master move, a calculated strategy aimed to stir public recognition. The goal was to link Santos to Uribe and profit on the latter's high rates of public approval. The mission was achieved. Although, previous to this shift in the campaign Santos was known to be Uribe's candidate, the straightforward visual association in the new publicity pieces boosted his public recognition and his popularity. As Rendón explained in our meeting, people could relate to the new colors and the new forms the campaign took. He disciplined the message by tying different elements of the campaign that in the beginning were loose. Rendón provided a direct linkage of Santos to Uribe's nationalist project, but making sure that Santos kept his own identity as a diplomat who welcomed any political opinion. For this purpose, the Colombian flag colors were widely used, and the Partido de la U was highlighted to be the Partido de Unidad Nacional (Party of National Unity) where everyone, independent of political ideology, had a place as long as they were working for the prosperity of the nation.



Santos' campaign before J.J Rendón



Santos' campaign after J.J Rendón

Tying up the elements of the campaign was paired up with the vertical organization and fine-tuning of the campaign mechanics itself. Half jokingly, half seriously J.J Rendón portrayed his arrival to the campaign: “I asserted my position of leadership, I would tell people what to do in the middle of a meeting regardless their position within the campaign.” He made sure that everyone in the campaign knew that he was in charge. And for this purpose, he established a vertical organization where the only one who had all the information about his campaign and about the strategy was Rendón himself.³⁶ This way any information leak would be avoided and the message of the campaign would be more easily managed and controlled. The different teams working within the campaign followed this vertical and centralized organizational scheme, and accordingly all the information coming from the campaign was managed this way.

The use of social media, the Internet and news outlets from the point of view of the Santos campaign looked dramatically different from the “cyber-utopianism” rehashed by the enthusiastic Mockus followers, but keeping the sense of media being the world of the *voto de opinión* at its core. Instead of a libertarian tool that would unleash the full realization of freedom, the Internet in this highly managed environment was another site that needed special managerial skills in order to use this technological platform to the best advantage of the campaign and to advance freedom. Felipe, a young lawyer working in the social media team of the campaign, recalls his experience working with Ravi Singh, social media and Internet campaigning “guru” hired³⁷ to counteract the increasing

³⁶ This is a common practice among political consultants and political strategists. Campaign strategies are often considered “campaign secrets” and they remain secret even after elections have passed.

³⁷ According to an investigative report that circulated months after the election (León 2011), Ravi Singh misrepresented himself as a campaign guru who had won the Obama election. Campaigns worldwide hired his services believing his credentials.

popularity of Antanas Mockus: “He [Ravi Singh] called his closest team of collaborators his lieutenants. We were nine people with very specific tasks [and specific skills].” No one in the team knew what the strategy was, and as lieutenants they followed directions. The Santos campaign’s use of social media followed this highly managed and vertical form of political practice. Alejandro, another member of Santos’ social media team, described his involvement: “when you spot a sentiment on the Internet, you only need to light a match and it starts spreading like a wild fire.” The trick is to control the fire. He was in charge of lighting the fire and keeping it burning. In Santos’ campaign, web developers replicated pyramidal campaign structures of administration that resorted to (human) gatekeepers of information in order to guarantee the efficacy of social media. The web administration team combined administrators and trustworthy members who spread information among their networks. Their task was to keep the campaign message “disciplined,” in line with the rest of the campaign, and to regulate web-based participation to avoid any attacks from hackers.

This approach also follows the premises of the industry of public relations as outlined by Bernays in the mid-20th century, and a conception of freedom enrooted in access to knowledge and freedom of speech. Bernays (2004: 59) writes that the public relations industry should strive for the ‘Engineering of Consent,’ “action based only on thorough knowledge of the situation and on the application of scientific principles and tried practices in the task of getting people to support ideas and programs.” In his view, the engineering of consent advances the freedom to persuade and suggest, a central feature in any democracy. He argues that citizens often do not have the information to make a decision on the urgent issues that government faces and that require public

consent, and therefore citizens need to be convinced by their leaders on how to act best. Although Bernays does not cite John Dewey (Dewey 1954), his preoccupation is in debate with Dewey's pragmatic concern with citizens needing to be experts and have an informed opinion on every public issue, an impossible requirement. For Dewey, this was a problematic feature of American democracy that was fostering an increasingly apathetic public culture; for Bernays it was a condition of democracy that required the dexterous aid of the industry of Public Relations in order to advance democratic principles³⁸.

With the export of the American political consulting industry to reforming democracies, it is no surprise that these ideas still linger on in other parts of the world where local political consultants organize the political game, even with new technologies like social media and the Internet. In fact, political consultants and political managers in Colombia generally conceive of the Internet and other media as the home, or the world, of the *voto de opinión*. They conceive them as part of a network that needs to be integrated in order to manage public perception and be able to persuade free, rational individuals through rational and also emotional arguments. Very similar to Bernays' notion, these consultants conceive of different media as a platform to reach an anonymous collectivity with a brain of its own, a brain that can be measured, known, studied and guided through the standardization of different techniques (some of which were explored in chapter 3). As Alejandro, a member of Santos' web campaign, put it:

In social networks people are not fooled easily and they have a way of collective thinking that's superior to the collective way of thinking that people can have watching TV where they do not have other referents to

³⁸ John Dewey was a strong critic of Edward Bernays. In Dewey's review of Walter Lippman's book "The Phantom Public" he wrote against public relations as a new form of falsification of the deliberative rationality that he so much defended (Fairfield 2010).

compare what is being said. If you post a dubious message on the Internet, people will start commenting immediately, they will defend it or attack it, and people will always find ways to get better information. The most important thing in a social media strategy is to [manage] perception, more than merely broadcasting a message. The message has to be the same [consistent] so people believe it (...) the most important thing is to persuade people, to win people over.

Alejandro's view is biased by his own social media expertise. But his view is not distant at all from the views of political strategists who work within the political management industry and who work as well with other media. Camilo Rojas, one of the political strategists with whom I worked during fieldwork, collected and analyzed campaigns worldwide. He often highlighted the techniques for moving emotions that these spots appealed to. "If you have a candidate that is not charismatic, you can show him surrounded by children, that will soften his image. If the candidate is not considered executive enough, highlight the technocrats that advise him rather than focusing on the candidate himself." For every situation, he provided a set of techniques and visual forms that appealed to shifting perception. In several occasions I heard him say, "I always think how an event will look on TV." But what he meant was not just TV. His comment revealed a concern with how visual images and emotional messages molded perception, and how these messages could be spread consistently in different media, to make everyone talk about the same issue in the same way and at the same time.

PART 2

Strategic politics

In the days previous to the first round Presidential Election Day in 2010, Colombia's public scene saw the spectacular popularity of the Green Party's presidential candidate Antanas Mockus skyrocket. All of the major public media, and web-based social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, were awash with the images of this collective enthusiasm. However, on May 30th after the first round presidential election,³⁹ the polling results showed that the enthusiasm for the "Green Wave" was not as collective as the media portrayed it. Juan Manuel Santos won the election by a 25% margin. A public joke circulating the next day in the same social media that glorified Mockus sardonically described his defeat: "Mockus won in Putumayo [the one territory he actually won], Twitter and Facebook." Political pundits and political consultants all around explained this defeat by raising arguments concerning the voting behaviors of consumers of web-social media: they are not disciplined enough and they don't go to the voting polls, they can change their minds last minute, and there is no way to make them accountable for their actions. Others, including J.J Rendón, Santos' own strategist in chief, blamed the defeat on the unmanaged and unsystematic nature of Mockus' campaign. As Rendón remembers, Mockus may have had the multitude and the publicity on his side, but Santos had politics on his.

³⁹ The Colombian presidential electoral system has the possibility of Ballotage. If on the first electoral round none of the candidates have an absolute majority, a second round is carried out where the two candidates who obtained the highest results on the first round face each other.

This explanation, however, told only half of the story, and as an observer of the electoral process in Colombia, I could not quite figure out why Mockus' popularity and ample publicity did not translate into votes. If Santos and Mockus were campaigning on basically the same media, why did Santos' followers go to the polls and Mockus' followers not go? I asked this question to one of Santos' campaign members. He simply answered: "Voters were not on the Internet, they were in *la maquinaria* [the political machine]."

The production of a media-based national discourse contrasts with the micromanaged world of electoral politics on the streets. The architecture of media-oriented worlds harvests the rapid exchange of information among a large number of anonymous individuals, while face-to-face electoral spaces foster the word-of-mouth, intimacy and relatedness. In Colombia, the latter world is conceived of as the space for the *voto amarrado*, the tied vote. As its name suggests, it is represented as the antinomy of the freedom of will, individuality and anonymity that the *voto de opinión* is supposed to stand for. On the contrary, the *voto amarrado* is associated with rural and urban contexts of marginality, with spaces of need and necessity, with ties of solidarity and closeness, in short to political pre-modernity as so many times conceptualized by social scientists and policy makers (Auyero 2000; Roudakova 2008; Schiller 2011). These spaces contrary to the *voto de opinión* do not promote anonymity but rather promote closeness and loyalty.

In our late liberal moment in which rationalization, standardization and anonymity are valued as paragons of progress, these spaces are taken to be uncomfortable, a malaise of politics that hinders open participation, accountability and

transparency. However, face-to-face politics are real, and as scholars in subaltern studies have pointed out, this form of politics is politics at large in most of the world (Chatterjee 2006). The fantasy of a national space attuned to seemingly universal liberal principles evinces symbolic power at work: “The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the ‘middle passage,’ or the central European steppes, across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people” (Bhabha 1994: 139-140). As the instauration of the nation-state in the colonial world that Bhabha critiques, the democratization wave in the late and post cold war period followed similar logics, as Chatterjee (2006) argues. Rather than establishing a worldwide “homogeneous, empty time,” the same linear time frame, the same political ideals and therefore the same political experiences for the entire world, the experience of political and economic reformation that broad parts of the world underwent in the 1980s and 1990s revealed the “heterogenous time of modernity.” Political experience is rooted in plural and fragmented global and local political processes, and taking democratic politics as a unity replicated globally is a misconstruction of political experience. And as Chatterjee continues to argue, this misconstruction is tainted by colonial legacies that reproduce everywhere hierarchical structures of power.

Although the experience of Colombia is distant from the experience of India where Chatterjee centers his analysis, Chatterjee’s argument offers an entry point to conceptualize the fragmentation and segmentation of political logics and political spaces within a national legal and political framework. In countries with a strong colonial

legacy where race/class/caste operate as a segmenting social function, politics and political spaces are fragmented too, and the power dynamics at work in social segmentation inform how both the political field and political action are structured. In politics, and more evidently in electoral politics, elites and “subalterns” meet in complicated ways. Chatterjee coins the term “political society” to account for the dynamics that these social structures sponsor. In a biopolitical fashion, elites articulated in NGOs, state agencies and expert institutions diagnose, intervene and seek to transform the underprivileged’s livelihoods without altering the structure of ownership or power. In return, in these settings of poverty, these groups “have to pick their way through this uncertain terrain by making a large array of connections outside the group—with other groups in similar situations, with more privileged and influential groups, with government functionaries, perhaps with political parties and leaders. *They often make instrumental use of the fact that they can vote in elections (...) the instrumental use of the vote is only possible within a field of strategic politics*” (Chatterjee 2006: 40-41) [Italics are mine].

Chatterjee’s characterization of Indian political dynamics in squatters’ neighborhoods can also be taken out of context to describe the Colombian *maquinaria* [political machine] that mobilizes electoral processes. As in India, the Colombian electoral competition is configured within a “field of strategic politics,” where demands are mobilized and social and political positions are negotiated. For many Colombians, the experience of electoral politics means taking part in the political game to get something in exchange that cannot be obtained otherwise, or to fulfill sociopolitical demands that are not regularly fulfilled by the state. As Westbrook (2004) diagnoses, this version of

liberal politics is most prevalent in our current world where the “grammar of property” and where economic capital guide any form of political logics, what he terms “the City of Gold.” In this sense, strategic politics is not limited to the dispossessed, the disenfranchised and the marginal, but is a condition of politics in itself. In Westbrook’s point of view, any social mobilization seeking to guarantee resources for itself in the framework of a blurred state falls within the field of strategic politics. Westbrook’s interpretation offers an analytical entry to understand political competition in a world of uncertainty and instability, where public and private functions are easily interchangeable, and where production and labor have become increasingly flexible and deterritorialized. Strategic politics as a condition of late-liberal polities explains its prevalence in different contexts, from the management of public media, to the backrooms of country clubs, to the darkest corners of any third-world slum.

This sense that the managing of political behaviors and any form of political participation informs political managers works, especially when it comes to directing the electoral bases of candidates. Nicolás, a seasoned political manager who unabashedly shared his view about politics, understood it as a field guided by the fulfillment of personal interests and personal needs, a place to strategically allocate resources: “Everyone works within the CVY⁴⁰ logic. Politicians deliver what you want and you’re not voting for an ideal but for the CVY [an interest]. In a way, everyone is looking for their own personal CVY [personal interest]; I’m interested in education, that my school gets fixed or that I can land a scholarship.” And therefore, as he added half jokingly, half seriously, the job of any political manager, of any political strategist is to effectively

⁴⁰ CVY stands for “Como voy Yo” [What’s in for me] a common expression used in politics to exchange favors for money, other favors, commodities, etc.

manage personal interests in order to align potential voters. However, this management is segmented according to a class bias, as Nicolás noted:

The politician knows that there are some proposals that are *populacheras* [vulgar and populist] that are targeted to certain sectors that are very difficult to convince because those people [sic] are incredulous. What those people [sic] like is getting the ready tiles⁴¹ and not the long-range technical proposal. They are used to being tricked. You cannot trick the wealthy, you cannot promise them to lower taxes and not do it. If you don't deliver they'll go to the media, they will withdraw their economic support for the campaign.

Nicolás' sense of strategic politics and how interests work is very attuned to the idea that the people who run politics are within the political machine, they are the ones who elect, the ones with the ability to coordinate actions that will effectively affect decision-making in the political realm and therefore affect the contours of political power. Politics is a well-oiled machine where different interests come together and are negotiated in very complex ways. And these logics often make the machine unfold in places that formally look as open and transparent, as the spaces where the *voto de opinión* is supposed to dwell, but that appeal to privatized networks to mobilize action and affect political outcomes.

Machine politics

Mr. H, a local Bogotanean politician, runs an organization that articulates neighborhoods, public offices, national politicians and local leaders. After congress elections, Mr. H met with his community leaders and with the representative that he

⁴¹ During elections it is fairly common to see politicians campaigning in poor neighborhoods and rural areas giving away construction materials and tiles in exchange for votes.

sponsored, who won a seat in the House of Representatives. It was a time for what looked like a political family to celebrate together, a time to thank everyone, and a time to also honor those who had mobilized the votes for this political dream to happen. People from all strata were there, and the environment was one of familiarity and camaraderie. Everyone knew each other, in spite the different places where they lived and worked; after all they all belonged to the same political family under the protection of Mr. H. I arrived and people stared at me. Although it was a “public” gathering, the masking anonymity public spaces offer was not in place here. Strangers stood out in an awkward way, like most American anthropologists when doing their fieldwork. Although I was a native anthropologist, I clearly didn’t belong. I wasn’t native to that “family,” nor to that world.

I had been invited to the meeting by my friend’s aunt, Mrs. M, who was one of the local leaders in a middle-class neighborhood in Bogotá. I had been able to access this organization through proximity and referrals, through bonds of trust and familiarity. Mrs. M was there with her son, Carlos, who also belonged to the organization. Once there I explained that I was doing research on electoral politics and I wanted to learn more about the role of the leaders and how these political organizations worked. Contrary to all expectations of secrecy that I had, they were eager to show me around, share stories with me, introduce me to other members of the organization and point out who the most relevant and powerful people were within the organization. Being a person who had been referred by a close person to Mrs. M, I became another familiar face to whom she could provide some help.

Carlos, Mrs. M's son, was eager to share with me the inner workings of the organization and the motivations to be in it. "My mom joined the organization and was happy to help out mobilizing voters in our neighborhood under one condition: in exchange Mr. H would find me a job in one of Bogotá's public offices." And so he did. Carlos worked in a local office with other people who also belonged to the organization. They were all Mr. H's people and they recognized themselves as such. Carlos continued to explain how having a job in a public office and belonging to an electoral machine worked: "In the office, we prioritize to solve those problems that will mobilize the most votes." And accordingly, mobilizing voters is often the way in which citizens find a way to bargain with city officials, a way to have the State be delivered to their door, as so many times described by the scholarly work that has explored patronage and clientelism as an objective sociopolitical organizational function (Strickon and Greenfield 1972; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008).

The literature on patronage and clientelism often highlights the ties of loyalty and personal closeness of these political arrangements as a feature that evinces its political pre-modernity. Patronage and clientelism have been mainly placed as a political mode of feudal systems or systems that participate in a market economy in limited ways (i.e. provincial rural systems with isolated economies). As Gellner points out (Gellner and Waterbury 1977: 4), "It is the incompletely centralized state, the defective market or the defective bureaucracy which would seem to favor it [patronage]." In this view, patronage and clientelism emerges from an objective fracture between local practices and broader rationally organized structures. However, this framework falls short when explaining the resilience of clientelism in an ideologically constructed technocratic world. Still, even if

there are in place exams of qualification, academic titles, transparency advocates operating in how state institutions are organized, these political organizations are highly effective in directing and delivering the face of the state. The question to ask then is how the intertwining of public and private worlds in political management has permeated certain arrangements to endure macroeconomic and macropolitical shifts.

The intertwinement of personal and public worlds that political communication industries sponsor is also a constitutive feature of political machines. Although political machines as an analytical category seem distant and antithetical to the ideas of post-industrial, late modern societies, they share this blurring between what we have constructed as public and private subjectivities. As explored in this dissertation, affect is an instrumental category that political managers crafting public messages use to appeal to voters. In the political machine, affect, personal relations and loyalty are capitalized as the meat and bones of any political association. The difference between these blurring nevertheless lies in its source for legitimacy and at an organizational level. In the world of political communication the intertwinement of public and private is the platform on which to mobilize anonymous individuals, and these individuals are publicly visible, and legitimate as aggregates in anonymous statistics, demonstrations, in tweets and crowds. In the world of the electoral machine, on the other hand, faces count. And the coordination of political action unfolds as intimacy, loyalty, recognition and legitimacy within the political organization provide a solid ground to achieve effective political action.

“People in the organization are very natural and unaffected, no one is pretentious,” Mrs. M pointed out to highlight how fortunate she was to belong to this

organization. Carlos jumped in to add that he was “treated like a professional” and no one looked down on him. Another woman jumped into the conversation to signal, however, that they knew their people, and that they knew who was bringing in good work and who was not. They know who is a “*lagarto*,” [lizard] meaning who is in just to obtain personal benefit without contributing to the organization as a whole. And the group of people who were talking highlighted how important it is for everyone to get a benefit; this sense of cooperation and solidarity is a very powerful social glue, especially in a moment where the state, its functions, and the ways of belonging to the state are not clear or straightforward. Another woman taking part in the conversation in an ironic manner, and as an intended pun, started to sing one of the Green Party’s signature political chants used to highlight their freedom and the individuality of their political consciousness: “*Yo vine porque quise, a mí no me pagaron* [I came because I wanted to. Nobody paid me to come].” Everyone around burst into laughter after the joke. The ironic and subversive undertones of the pun was a wink among the people there who knew that in the world of the political machine those ideas of transparency, anonymity and disinterested politics are simply absurd.

Private networks in public spaces

Anyone, an anonymous citizen, can step into any of the public gatherings, campaign headquarters, political local meetings and activities that politicians hold to connect with their electoral base. But being able to be there does not mean accessing the political networks that sponsor these spaces. Rather, these spaces are some sort of

publicly private spaces open to anybody, but where face-to-face politics, loyalty, solidarity ties and relatedness are central to the operability of the space in itself. Therefore, the question arises about how to understand these places. The public/private divide that liberal politics has delimited to classify and understand collective and productive activities as opposed to intimate and more individual activities falls short when situated in these spaces where public affairs are discussed among private networks. Such social theorists as Erving Goffman (1959) have described these intimate political dwellings as “a backstage” of public life, in an attempt to understand the private (privacy) within an activity that is eminently public: politics – polis (city). This definition of the backstage of public life suggests what is hidden, inaccessible and out of public sight, while also defining how public life unfolds. However, these spaces are often open and inserted in public life itself, although the networks assembling in these places may not be public by definition.

Susan Gal (2002) signals this problematic definition of the public and private divide, and elaborates on feminist approaches that have questioned this divide as a western, male-centered, ideological construct. Gal points to the widespread forms of liberal politics that make the public and private divide a real, tangible form of categorizing life for people around the world. But, in this author’s view, this is not a rigid, binary opposition between public and private, but rather a permanent negotiation. Gal understands the public and private divide as operating in a fractal logic; in every space of life, people negotiate what is public and what is private, and the divide is replicated at different scales. In Gal’s view, “indexical gestures” and “semiotic markers” that people enact in different speech acts and practices delimit what is constituted as

private and as public. This analysis is fruitful in understanding how political spaces where strategic politics is deployed can both be public and private at the same time. The spaces are conceived to be public, to deal with public affairs, but the networks that inhabit these spaces promote loyalty, intimacy and proximity in order to coordinate actions that will affect public life, and therefore through these practices reenact privacy while being in the limelight.

Political strategists and political managers are well aware of these hybrid forms of public and private as a format in which politics is successfully and strategically mobilized. Therefore, they also pay close attention to “informal,” non-mediatized forms of campaigning, or mediatized forms of campaigning that promote private networks. As Gonzalo de Francisco put it when I asked about the mechanisms that political managers use to know if a campaign is going well:

There are three ways we know: the focus groups, the polls, and the contact with people in the development of the campaign. If you want to see if a campaign is doing well, just go to the campaign headquarters and see the level of activity (...) if there's people, if there's activity and things are getting stolen (sic) chances are the campaign is going well. There's always a guy that no one knows standing there (...) When the candidate comes to the headquarters he pulls a lot of people as well, and there are some systems of information that people know when he (or she) is going to be there. People go there to ask him for jobs, and as elections get closer, it can get unmanageable and the candidate has to stop going there unless it is for concrete things. People won't go to a losing campaign, there are some other people who go to several campaign headquarters, but the campaign that gets most people is the one that's winning.

Bringing attention to the campaign not only from a media perspective but working from more lateral forms of communication, such as the spread of gossip and rumors, is central to management. Nicolás always reminded me that those candidates elected through the

opinion vote and who did not build an electoral base, meaning a stable group of voters who would vote for the candidate, would not be incumbents if they did not build that base when in office. He used the example of many congresspeople who are unknown in the public arena, who rarely are on the covers of any newspaper or on billboards on the streets, but who have served several terms as congress people. Usually these candidates masterfully handle the negotiation of personal and collective interests in exchange for support and votes. Therefore, political managers play close attention to the work that political teams put into building and keeping contact with the base. Handling these effective forms of political exchange and the political communication strategies that come with these exchanges is crucial for making any campaign successful.

In a visit I paid to the Chief Assistant to a recently elected representative from Mr. H's organization at the Congress offices in Bogotá, he explained how this intertwinement between public affairs and private networks was handled. He started by saying that their work was mainly centered in a poor area in the south side of Bogotá, and they mainly worked with senior citizens, although they handled "many of the community's problems." He continued to explain:

The contact with people is very important to us after elections and during elections. We as a political organization, or mainly our Representative, is not known by public opinion so we have to reach the neighborhoods, go there with [development] proposals for the community. If you walk down the alleys here in Congress, you'll see that many of the offices are empty (...) we instead have our doors open to listen to people, we are their voice and help them mobilize community projects. Our organization has a leader, Mr. H, who is a councilman in Bogotá, and we also have 23 town councilors working for us, who help us place people's concerns in local and national government offices' agendas. As a political organization our duty is not just political representation but helping start community projects at every level.

After I left his office, I stood outside with the community leaders who were part of the organization and helped mobilize voters for the representative. They were there for a variety of reasons, voicing concerns, asking for help, or asking for personal favors. Standing in this alley, the strategic mobilization of politics in order to secure certain resources became evident, and with it I could see how public affairs and private networks intertwined. Not everybody could access the office of the Representative; the people there were the people who belonged to the organization and who had different stakes in it. Just coming to the Congress offices and the security checkpoints that they have implies knowing somebody who can grant you access. As we chatted, the community leaders bragged about how many votes they managed to get for the candidate. A woman referred to the manager of community leaders for a senator, whom I happened to meet during my fieldwork: “I don’t understand how now he has a job in Congress when he didn’t get as many votes as other people did.” Her sullen remark encapsulated the dense interplay of personal stakes, public affairs and networked forms of organization that come together in the mobilization of strategic politics.

In a technocratic world of screens and transparency, this dense interplay has moved to the TV screen, as it will be explored in the next section.

The Architecture of Loyalty in the era of screens

The spaces in which affairs get mobilized by private networks entail such privatized forms of political communication as gossips and rumors. Political consultants in Colombia know that these privatized forms of sharing information are highly effective

in affecting the public reputation of candidates. Putting a face to a message, tying the message to a person who delivers it, makes the message more credible, especially when politics mobilizes in close-knit networks rather than in mass messages. Rather than having the vertical reception of a broadcast message, or a message gone viral, word-of-mouth is tremendously powerful in reinforcing intimacy and “truthiness.” This notion of rumors and gossip is very close to the anthropological perspectives on how they operate. Rumors and gossip stand as a form of communication defined by function and its relation to social and politics contexts (Besnier 2009). Trying to define it as a standalone social form can be futile since depending on where it is situated it takes different forms. For instance, rumors and gossip have been characterized as a grassroots form of resistance in highly repressive environments (Perice 1997; Scott 1990); as solidarity forming (Gluckman 1963; Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider 2008); as a way to start conflict and push a personal agenda (Stewart and Andrew Strathern 2004); or as a way in which elites manage “privileged” information as they reinforce their elite position (Paine 1967). Rumors and gossip can be all of the above, and political strategists and consultants are well aware of the strategic potential that rumors and gossip have; the key is to manage them properly.

Nicolás often referred to certain campaign strategies that were very effective in stirring a candidate’s reputation. These strategies entailed privatized forms of communication in public settings. Nicolás and his firm would hire “actors” to have candid and casual conversations about certain candidates in settings such as public transportation, parents association meetings in schools, or in line at the voting polls. The actors would “share” anecdotes or experiences they had with certain candidates

(fabricated but with a degree of “truthiness,” of course), so that other people could overhear. These conversations either highlighted positive aspects of the candidate Nicolás was managing, or highlighted negative aspects of the opposing candidate. Nicolás believed that sometimes these forms of communication were even more effective and affected people’s vote more than any spot or political campaign ad, even the most brilliant of them all.

This strategic mobilization of messages that entails a blurring between private and public forms of communication can be analyzed as the traveling of “metapragmatic discourse.” As Debra Spitulnik (1996) analyzes in Zimbabwe, media information and media talk (public) gets appropriated in daily talk (private) and reworked in different ways. She sees a process of decontextualization and recontextualization where “audiences” appropriate and also participate in shaping media messages and meanings. In the work of political consultants in Colombia, there is a similar process at work where messages are crafted objects that travel and get “used” in different contexts. The different “uses” and the different media through which these messages travel create a very fluid dynamic between messages that are intended to be all encompassing, to reach a national audience, and messages that are appropriated and mobilized among privatized networks of communication. However, in recent years and with the broad use of television and other media in politics in Colombia, the connection and fluidity between mass communication and private networks in the mobilization of politics has become more intertwined than ever, and distinguishing them as separate analytical categories is futile.

The most striking example of the interplay of these fluid forms of political communication was President Uribe's highly successful media-centered government strategy. During Alvaro Uribe's government his popularity was built on the skillful management of public relations, which appealed to facelessness, technocracy and impersonality, while also appealing to the intimacy and relatedness that mobilizes politics effectively. Many political managers praised his style of government, not for its ethical contents, but rather for how accurately he understood the formats of power and used them in savvy ways. During his eight years of government, he established the "Community Councils," a style of government that has been typified as "neo-populist"--characterized by a very strong nationalist discourse, neoliberal economic measures, instead of the protectionist economics characteristic of populist regimes, and a heavy reliance on media to manage public affairs (Barczak 2001; Torre 2005; Weyland 2003). Every Saturday president Uribe and his cabinet would go to a remote town in Colombia and hold a town hall meeting that was televised on public television. Usually these meetings lasted for nine hours or more, and although nobody watched them, everyone knew about them. In these meetings, people would line up to ask the president himself to solve their most local problems, from the pavement of a street, to the protection of their lives.⁴² Often, the president himself handed the checks of public subsidies to people who came to the councils, as if it was he and not the state that was doing a favor to the people who needed it most.

⁴² In 2003, Tito Díaz Salgado, the mayor of El Roble, Sucre, a small town in an area where the paramilitaries had a very strong influence, used the community council to ask for Uribe's protection: "Mr. President, they are going to kill me," referring to the politicians and paramilitaries who were after him. He was murdered days after this public intervention.

In 2007, I came to one of these community councils in Santa Marta, Colombia, where my uncle was an elected public official. I was in the city visiting my family and I heard the rumor that in a week's time they would have a community council meeting. As a naïve outsider, it seemed funny to me that the information about the council traveled as a rumor instead of as a public announcement about a scheduled event. Two days before the council the rumor was confirmed to be true --the council was taking place. My uncle told me that he could get me in as long as he could register my name in "the system." The only requirement to be registered was my ID and my full name. He called me late the night before the community council to inform me that I was one of the last names that had been able to be registered. At that point I really could not figure out what were the criteria to participate in these spaces. Everything seemed highly technocratic and impersonal, but when looking closer it was not quite. Apparently if you knew someone who had access to "the system," access was granted.

Once there, after three checkpoints in which they asked my name, and the organization I represented (I said I was accompanying my uncle and they let me through), we got into the building disposed for the meeting. It was a conference room constructed in a "tropical style." Once in the room the intense heat from the studio lights, the cables scattered all over the room, the huge TV screens and the TV cameras, gave the appearance one was entering a TV studio. There was chaos and movement all over the place. People were arriving, greeting each other, chatting, just like as in a meeting among friends. Journalists were chasing the local mayors, the governor of the region, and of course the high official that had come from Bogotá. I could feel the piercing glances of those habitués of the councils. It felt as if they were regular characters in a TV series and

we the “new ones,” just unknown stuntmen. As I learnt later through my uncle, most of the people there knew each other; as he described them, “They are part of a portion of the population in Colombia who make a living out of politics.” And they belong to very tight networks that meet in different public arenas.

The room came to a climatic frenzy when the main character of the show arrived, the president. He stepped into the room surrounded by his bodyguards and followed by his cabinet. Journalists were hurling themselves over one another frantically. They were pushed away by the bodyguards. Everyone in the room rose either to salute the president or take a glance at him. When he came to the area of the auditorium where I was, people stood up and stretched their hands eagerly to greet him. He responded with a frozen smile and a “an affectionate greeting to all of you.” I was sitting in the second floor of the auditorium so I could not quite reach Uribe’s hand. I was not even going to try to shake his hand, but the people around me encouraged me to get up and try to shake the president’s hand. They even gave me, literally, an extra push. I stretched as far as I could encouraged by these people (and afraid that they would take my negative as an anti-patriotic gesture). I felt someone pushing me, I turned around and the lady sitting next to me was grabbing my rear, pushing me so I could reach. It was a grotesque scene: The lady with her hands on my rear, me trying to be the elastic woman and the president bending over, all in the midst of a yelling crowd and the TV cameras. I came back to my seat after my failed attempt and the lady sitting next to me, who had just grabbed my rear, just gave me this disappointed face and remarked that it was a pity I had not shaken the president’s hand.

Once the meeting started, for every topic discussed the responsible minister, and even vice-minister, was there to answer mainly the president's questions. He dropped questions on statistics and the status of public constructions. The ministers rushed to their notes, opened their laptops, made phone calls in order to answer promptly and correctly. I was able to see some nervousness as they answered the inquiries. Efficiency seemed to be the act they were displaying. The president either congratulated, asking the audience to applaud, or publicly dismissed the ministers' interventions with further questions about the explanations of the delays in their work. Furthermore, efficiency was displayed at its fullest when the president asked to sign a public contract onsite instead of waiting to do it through the appropriate office; he even suggested names to name the public works that would be done.

The mismatch between technocratic styles and their contents was more noticeable when the conversation shifted to micro-credits. As the president started talking about the topic, the people sitting in front of me stood up. They did not look like public officials but rather like common farmers of the region. They all wore the same t-shirt with institutional propaganda on micro-credits. At this point, I thought I had found civil society, the "communities" that these councils were advertised for but that up until that point I had not seen. However, they were also part of the "political" community that my uncle had described earlier. The president introduced them as beneficiaries of the mobile credits of the *Banco Agrario* [Agrarian bank]. These people had applied for credits and had been successful at getting them. As the president explained to the auditorium – mastering his knowledge of the region – usury was one of the main problems that people lived in their day-to-day lives. Therefore the government was relieving their grievances

with these easy-to-access credits. Rather than being spontaneous participants in the meeting, the people in the t-shirts were brought in to illustrate a government policy.

The president began to ask each one his or her particular story. Each answered and took advantage of the air-time to bring up other concerns about their personal credits. For every inquiry the president programmed a meeting with either the appropriate minister or vice-minister. He even asked the police chief of the region to accompany these people to pay the usurer. I thought it was a joke but after a few repetitions of the same line, I could tell the president meant it as a command. Before giving away the credits, the president asked for a priest. One came to the center stage and blessed the credits. People prayed for the money they had just received from the government, thanking God, and of course, the president. After the blessings a protocol picture was taken showing the beneficiaries of the credits receiving the checks from government authorities.

During my fieldwork during 2010, a joke circulated to ironically describe this style of government which combined technocratic formalities and clientelistic forms of doing politics: This was the M.I.T government, a government that combined '*manzanilla y técnica*' [clientelism and technique]. However, every observer of politics noticed how effective the skillful management of public spaces and private networks was in mobilizing the political. Both forms played on a deep desire for transparency that in contemporary discourses is the standard for ethical politics (Marilyn Strathern 2000) and on the effective and reliable power of coordination of action that privatized networks managing resources have. Political strategists and political managers took note.

Chapter 5

Unrelenting Hope: Invoking Democracy in a “Failed” State

In 1991, the student movement transformed Colombia’s institutions by achieving the unthinkable: calling for the reformation of the political constitution of 1886. A new political constitution was drafted that granted more citizen participation in a system that had been highly exclusionary. The hope was that these reforms would deliver peace and institutional stability therefore ending years of non-declared civil war. As years passed, peace seemed further away. War continued to be the daily bread for the next generation. The leaders of the student movement grew up seeing their youthful dreams never coming to concretion, but nevertheless, never losing the hope for a democracy that would eventually arrive.

In this chapter, I focus on the work of the Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE), a civil society NGO that works on electoral monitoring and whose executive and research directors were leaders of the student movement. Alejandra Barrios and Claudia López have never stopped fighting, and they continue to believe that another democracy is possible; despite it has not yet arrived. They work in partnership with international European and American NGOs and funding agencies, as well as with international civil society volunteers who come to Colombia to guarantee the fairness of the electoral process. During my fieldwork, I participated as the coordinator for the International Observation Missions and I was puzzled by the unrelenting hope that keeps burning in spite of a sense of living in a context of stagnant and ossified political institutions. Moreover, international actors joined in the fierce defense of Colombian political institutions also driven by a sense of shared hope for a country that is not theirs.

For all the people who participate in MOE election after election, local and international, hope materializes in the use of statistics and objective, observable data that surpass a widespread feeling that politics will never, ever change. As many people say to convey this feeling, politics is politics after all. I argue that by standardizing electoral processes and performing those standards in the unfolding of the electoral observation, NGOs set the plausible grounds for, and partially recreate, a democracy that will eventually come. This sense of future is constructed by negotiating a sense of agency where present and future intermingle, and that reframes individual and collective grassroots power in the midst of overarching power structures.

This chapter is organized around three themes. I first look at the double-edged legitimating work that NGOs do for themselves and for local governments by using statistical language. In doing so, NGOs carve a space for civil society to exist and lay the foundations for strong institutions that will eventually come, and also anticipate and prefigure the democratic practices that these institutions are supposed to support. I then move to understand statistics as a language of hope that allows imagining plausible realities and shaping present contexts different from historical trends. Last, I look at hope as the location of horizontal internationalism that complicates notions of late liberal imperialism and unidirectional understandings of geopolitical power.

Broken promises, hopeful dreams, again

Todo ciudadano tiene derecho a participar en la conformación, ejercicio y control del poder político.

Artículo 40 – Constitución Política de Colombia⁴³

Alejandra Barrios, former leader of the student movement that pushed for the reform of the constitution in 1991, was a leading figure in the foundation of MOE in Colombia in 2006. During this year, Claudia López, journalist, researcher at MOE, and a life-long friend of Alejandra who also was involved in the leadership of the student movement in the early 1990s, had publicly denounced in her column in *El Tiempo* the ties between paramilitaries and elected congresspeople. The political constitution and the country that both Alejandra and Claudia had envisioned as young university students, and that had materialized, at least on paper (Lemaitre 2009), were under imminent threat. The very organ of democracy, congress, had been dramatically co-opted by the dark forces of death, the paramilitaries; the same forces that cruelly murdered villages under the strident sound of chainsaws and loud popular music played at full blast to harmonize their spectacle of horror⁴⁴.

In 1991 they pushed for the reformation of the constitution asking for a more participant and transparent democracy, motivated by the strong indignation that the rampant institutional corruption and violence caused in this youth, as was explored in

⁴³ “Every Citizen has the right to participate in the conformation, exercise and control of political power. ” Political Constitution of Colombia (1991)

⁴⁴ This image alludes to El Salado massacre where paramilitaries terrorized the population for days. Surviving victims tell that as the paramilitaries tortured the civilians, they played loud music and consumed alcohol to the point of oblivion.

chapter two. The social movement successfully attained its goal by articulating and translating a global language of open markets, individual responsibility and civic participation to localized sentiments, by bridging political “universals” of democracy and transparency constructed internationally with the realities at home (Delazay and Garth 2002). In 2006, Alejandra and Claudia felt that call again, and technification, transparency and participation once again provided the language to reclaim politics.

The idea of organizing a mission for the elections in 2006, as Alejandra remembers, seemed like a crazy one due to the lack of resources and the short time they had to organize it. At first, the idea was to bring the electoral monitors that the Organization of American States (OAS) sends when member countries require them. Alejandra and other NGOs working in human rights and governance sent several formal requests to Alvaro Uribe’s government asking for international monitors. After months of sending many letters, and of arguing that Colombia could request electoral monitors given that the electoral legislation included a clause allowing the government to request so, there was no answer. Frustrated by the government’s silence, but motivated by a strong will to reclaim Colombia from the forces that had installed narco-regimes of horror, Alejandra and a network of collaborators decided to organize an observation mission as Colombian civil society. Their legal framework was Article 40 of the Political Constitution that grants the right to political participation to any citizen. For Alejandra, that fundamental civil right allowed her to organize observation missions as a citizen: “We as citizens can do whatever is not forbidden by the law; [electoral observation] wasn’t forbidden.”

Alejandra knocked on every door possible, and her allies became the international community working in governance in Colombia, such as USAID and Swedish International Cooperation, and local catholic pastoral organizations and human rights NGOs. Based on the documents on electoral monitoring that the Carter Center and the OAS had developed as standard observation practices, Alejandra put together a document for Colombia. Her international partners referred her to the director of CAPEL⁴⁵, José Thompson, who provided the technical expertise to put the observation exercise in motion. For the legislative elections in 2006, 776 Colombian observers authorized by the Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE)⁴⁶ observed the elections in six major cities, and eight towns in areas controlled by illegal militias. Since then MOE has become a legitimate voice in monitoring elections in Colombia, a reliable source for political information and for exercising political control, in spite of the adverse conditions of corruption and violence that year after year threaten elections.

In fact, the members of MOE, the national directory and the regional directions, continue to work for the dream of a democracy not yet realized, a dream always under threat. Colombia lives in a perpetual state of emergency, amidst tacit, but still tangible, civil war (Tate 2007). Periods of relative peace are interspersed in between massacres, kidnappings, and corruption scandals. For many workers of peaceful governance, what is achieved in one day is shattered by a macabre event the next day. There is an acute sense that politics will never change, and the NGOs that work directly in monitoring political power work within this framework of stagnation and repetition, eternally negotiating their

⁴⁵ The Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion is a branch of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights based in Costa Rica, an authority in the defense and promotion of human rights in Latin America.

⁴⁶ The CNE is the central organ that regulates elections.

sense of frustration and helplessness and a hopeful outlook. As Alejandra clearly conveys,

In the congressional elections, we observed the same old practices. We didn't see anything different. The same clientelism, although before wasn't as evident as in this election. Still we have the same families [in power]. (...)

That's why [NGOs] end up working in human rights issues, in education for democracy, in [promoting] participation mechanisms but there's little work in exercising political control, when in the regions you would have a great capability of doing so. But going out to fight is very *verracó* [extremely difficult and requiring courage]. The factor of who is who, of who is giving out public contracts weighs a lot, especially if you're depending on the state to have social access, or to have education or healthcare. You'll be facing a few families that have the power. You can maybe exercise political control in Bogotá, Cali, Medellín and Barranquilla [the big cities] but not in the smaller ones where you face the monster of the state being the main employer. This is tragic for NGOs. In Bogotá we work with funding from international cooperation, but sometimes, regional NGOs depend on public contracts. That's why the umbrella of MOE is relatively effective. From the direction we can say things that cannot be said locally, or even that haven't been thought locally, but that we can say because it does not really affect us if a mayor or a congressperson stops talking to us.

In this bleak political landscape of powerlessness, for MOE and its collaborators hope is the last thing to lose. In spite of the adverse conditions that many MOE workers face, every election they go out to observe, making the democracy for which they long somewhat tangible, somewhat real. Stories of heroism and technique animate this sense of hope. As I was meeting the local coordinators, I came across Padre Eliécer Soto, a very well respected activist in Barrancabermeja, one of the most violent regions in Colombia. As Alejandra later told me, Padre Eliécer embodies courage and respect, and in his actions he makes democracy happen. The first time that Padre Eliécer organized an observation mission, he walked in front of the observers to act as a human shield since "those people [paramilitaries] believe that killing priests is bad luck." Election after

election he goes out and judiciously collects statistics, even if it means risking his own life.

In anthropological literature, the intrusion of both international NGOs in local governance and standardized political epistemologies (Pandolfi 2003; Paley 2001), particularly in third-world countries, has been many times critiqued as a late-liberal form of colonialism (Elyachar 2006) in which power differentials and territorial and economic scales (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) are assembled in complicated ways. Although these analyses illuminate convoluted realities in many parts of the world, this framework overshadows how international partnerships and standardized languages materialize hopeful outlooks.

In the months that I worked for MOE I had to learn a new language. I had to make a radical break from the cynical outlooks that often are associated with politics. The practitioners of politics I worked with rehashed a very particular form of pragmatism, closer to cynical reason (Sloterdijk 1987) --“We know what we’re doing and we’re still doing it”—a pragmatism anchored in the pressures of winning elections, of navigating local powers and therefore reproducing them.⁴⁷ But, MOE’s work cannot be classified as the public and complicit scripts of the powerless that reproduce structures of power, while unavailingly defying these in private (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Scott 1990) -- another brand of cynicism often explored in contexts of explicit individual powerlessness and ossified political representation (Yurchak 2006).

Despite working in a context where the news features a scandal every day but

⁴⁷ My dissertation project analyzes the intertwinement of free-market ideologies, classism and politics in post-reform Colombia. I carried out fieldwork among political consultants, political managers and politicians, and observed the particular technologies they deployed during elections that reconcile a class-segmented polity with participatory democracy.

where political structures remain rigid and immovable, MOE's work is unapologetically hopeful. I borrow elements from both Miyasaki's (2006) and Crapanzano's (2003) work on hope to frame the work of electoral observation in Colombia as an epistemic, experiential and affective operation that materializes a yearned democracy in the present. As Miyasaki (2006:130) reminds us, inspired by Ernest Bloch, "[t]he method of hope therefore revolves around radical temporal reorientation of knowledge and its replication of past hope in the present." But it is not just knowledge. Hope dwells at the interstice of experience and analysis (Crapanzano 2003), as a reflexive encounter that connects lived experiences and reflexive forms of self-fashioning, of being in and feeling the world (Faubion 2011). This operation results in the production of particular senses of agency that invert seemingly immovable power structures. Hope recursively gives shape to and is maintained by forms of expertise that translate ambiguous affective worlds into particular technologies that materialize desires for the future in the present (Boyer 2008). But, these materializations are not just translations and cultural codings of a subliminal, trans-cultural form of hope. Nor are these statistics the shape "the field of desire in waiting" takes in this particular context (Crapanzano 2003:19). Hope is a performative, an utterance of future, that does things in the present, to paraphrase Austin (1975). Hope constructs contexts by invoking the future in the present, grants meaning and is in dialogue with ways of being in the world.

MOE's work is not anchored in the past, it looks to the future and this gaze has particular materializations in the present. It is grounded in laying the foundations for a democracy that will eventually come, a democracy that was designed with the constitution of 1991 but that never came to fruition. The youthful dreams of the students

who envisioned a different political reality matured into a struggle to lay the concrete foundations for that dream to come true. And here there is no cynicism, nihilism or paralyzing doubts about the work they are doing. Anchored in another kind of temporality, MOE tiptoes around the heavy burden that a long-standing legacy of violence and usurpation has left behind: an incredulous public culture condemned to eternally repeat the self-fulfilling prophecy of a failed state (Bushnell 1993)⁴⁸.

Legitimacy, the sturdiest foundation of them all

Electoral monitoring is deployed in contexts of political instability and weak democratic institutions. The point of these exercises of observation is to pose the eyes of the international community on a particular election to make sure it is legitimate. This international exercise has many times being critiqued as masked neo-colonial forms of tourism (Soremekun 1999), or as evidence of very complicated macro political power plays that bring into question western definitions of sovereignty (Coles 2007).

However, the internationalism at stake in electoral observation in Colombia is also anchored in the hope to bring democracy to a place that offers the chance to make things right, to design a democracy from scratch, and therefore oversee that it effectively acts in the best interest of the majority. As Santa-Cruz (2005) describes, among the first observation missions in the Western Hemisphere were conceived at the intersection of an urgency to protect republican life and human rights on one side, and the Wilsonian internationalist principle of national self-determination, on the other. In the 1960s, the

⁴⁸ In Colombia, the idea that we live in a failed state that is not able to guarantee basic rights and citizen security is a widespread public sentiment as well as a very well-formed idea enrooted in academic thought.

first exercises of electoral monitoring sponsored by the nascent OAS were justified under a broader framework of the protection of human rights and democracy. The hope was that if these tenets were assured, this would guarantee the success of nations and therefore the harmonious orchestration of internationalism. A healthy world depended on healthy, successful individual nations. For this to happen, rocky political contexts could use an extra hand from fellow nations.

In Colombia, the birth of MOE, as Alejandra recalls, is justified under the broader umbrella of civil rights, of the right to participation. Calling for electoral observation as a basic civil right gave the legitimate justification for international observers to participate, at some capacity, in the sovereign ritual of national elections. In spite of the reservations and critiques (sometimes very well justified) to which these kinds of international exercises give rise, the presence of international electoral observers in Colombia does not undermine sovereignty. Rather, the presence of international observers strengthens governance by rendering state institutions legitimate.

This process of legitimating of the Colombian state occurs twofold: it is a matter of legitimating the state through international presence and through the use of solid statistical methods. First, the presence of an international contingent of observers means that the elections that the government calls for are legitimate to some extent, but they are at risk of being co-opted by obscure forces. If elections were plainly illegitimate, electoral observers would not even make the effort to travel great distances to engage in this very physically and emotionally demanding exercise. Second, observers have to adjust to the statistical language of the state in order to participate in a legitimate regime of representation.

Ted Lewis, the director of Global Exchange, an American-based human rights NGO, in partnership with MOE organized a pre-electoral observation mission that assembled several members from American NGOs. In the intense week they worked in Colombia, they traveled to “hot” regions to observe the pre-elections period. Before departing, they received training about elections in Bogotá, and visited the major political parties’ headquarters and the central offices of electoral regulating entities. To guarantee their security, MOE contacted the police. MOE’s regional coordinators saw this initiative as a move that relieved them of the burden of being in charge of the security of the American delegation. When the American mission came back to Bogotá after working in the regions, they complained about having the police by their side. As Ted Lewis expressed, “Colombia is nerve-wracking, we don’t feel safe.” This image was partially fueled by the desire for adventure, but also grounded in the very real horror stories of state officials working along side illegal groups. To respond to these complaints, MOE incessantly explained that the government was not our enemy, and that we worked within the legality of the state. Therefore, we trusted and supported the police forces.

This first friction was further irritated when the missions denounced the use of a government subsidy program (*Familias en Acción*) for electoral purposes. The American mission found that local politicians threatened poor populations to withdraw the subsidy if they did not vote for pro-government candidates. The American missions denounced the fact by making overarching claims about the government in general, suggesting this was a practice orchestrated from the highest levels of government. The negative reactions from government officials to these accusations threatened the legitimacy of MOE as a neutral NGO. The impasse was hashed out between the two organizations and the

government when the American observation mission adjusted their framework to the language and methodology that MOE used. They offered statistical evidence and concrete proof of how the subsidy program was being used specifically by certain politicians. The results were presented to government authorities with a very positive response.

These two vignettes show the careful work that MOE does in balancing their claims within the available and recognized vehicles of the state. In this way, observation missions are double-edged swords that seek to prevent fraud, but at the same time give legitimacy to the governments sponsoring the elections. As Ted framed his work as a seasoned international observer, “If there’s a system that doesn’t provide basic levels of fairness, to observe that election is to give credibility to something that at its base is not credible.” Therefore, their presence in Colombia stood in grey areas, of fighting illegal electoral practices for the sake of the common good while giving legitimacy to the government.

The balance between denunciation and legitimacy is central to design a methodology oriented to reproduce a hopeful political future in Colombia. Careful statistical work is crafted to provide a legitimate voice for MOE to be in dialogue with the government, international actors and civil society. The *Mapas de Riesgo* (Risk maps) are among the strongest tools that have consolidated MOE’s voice as a truthful source of electoral knowledge. By collecting statistics that government agencies and independent academic research groups gather regarding terrorist attacks during elections, MOE predicts which municipalities are at greater risk and therefore need more state security as well as closer electoral monitoring. MOE combines this work with the information that electoral observers collect in highly technical forms, where different forms of fraud and

illegal activities are typified as easily observable categories. Working within the systems of information that the government has set up gives MOE a halo of impartiality, regardless of the political leanings that the officers in the organization may have. At the same time, by working within the government's system of information, and by pairing up with international organizations, MOE gives legitimacy and credibility to government institutions.

Mario Mitre, a representative of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Colombia, frames this legitimating function of statistical information for elections:

I believe that the technification of the observation was very important. I don't know if you remember this email that said that there was fraud [in the presidential elections] because the records did not match; the Green party people said that the records of a table didn't match the ones that we had in *Registraduría*⁴⁹. And the work that MOE did of taking a random sample and we saw that there wasn't a systematic difference, therefore there was no fraud. This [exercise] puts everything into context. We can evaluate what the system did well, how it complied with the law, and also point fingers when needed. This is positive.

Statistics clean the "political" from electoral discourse, so to speak. Any political tinge, any bias, is swept away by the standardizing power of statistics and its claims to objectivity (Urla 1993). States express forms of biopolitical control, a form of control that is not anchored in partisan political discourse but in concerns of preserving life, through the framing power of statistics (Foucault 2007; Mitchell 2006). This is the language that MOE has adopted to be a legitimate state interlocutor, a legitimate voice of civil society.

⁴⁹ *Registraduría* is another of central regulating organ for elections and citizen information. They are in charge of counting the votes and gathering, processing and centralizing all of the electoral information. During the elections of 2010, Green Party members approached MOE after Mockus' dramatic defeat. They were concerned that Santos had won due to electoral fraud. For a week, all of us at MOE compared the records submitted by the electoral authorities at the voting polls with the centralized information in *Registraduría*.

MOE is a guardian of democratic life, and in a country with high incidences of political violence, preserving democracy is an attempt to preserve life itself.

This strategic process of self-legitimizing via statistical representation has unexpectedly resulted as well in a process of legitimating government institutions. MOE has learned to see and talk like a state, to speak the same language, and to participate in the same regimes of representation (Scott 1999). In this move legitimacy occurs twofold: the recognition of the government, an authoritative voice, of the work of MOE grants them the recognition of being an organization that works within the legitimate regimes of truth, therefore speaks the truth. But also, MOE, conceived as being part of civil society, that entity that in liberal democracy is conceived both to regulate and be regulated by the state, grants legitimacy to a government that is supposed to represent the best interests of their people.



Talking hope through statistics

The temporality and particular regime of representation articulated in statistical language is commensurable and compatible with the language of hope. As Miyazaki explains, hope is the experience of the “abeyance of agency,” the suspension of taking action in one’s own hand, and therefore a suspension of a sense of self. This suspension entails letting go of one’s ownership of one’s past, present and future, and is thus rooted in a temporality that lives the present as open. Hope dwells in the “now-time,” a time that is not marked or determined, a time that is shaped by its own unfolding. In his own work among Fijians claiming their territorial rights, Miyazaki observed how ritual repetition produced a seriality where the suspension of agency was followed by the return of agency, in a seriality that fulfilled expectations of hope, and maintained that flame alive.

This ritual seriality worked by first posing a problem without solution, a long-standing problem that dragged a sense of historical depth along, followed by giving a solution, often coded as a form of divine intervention. This ritual seriality rendered past, present and future as an embodied experience, constitutive of subjectivity, rather than just being a mere timeline to frame events that unfold. The idea of being determined by the past, trapped in events coming from the past, then suspending one's own sense of agency in the present since one cannot really change the conditions inherited from the past, and looking towards a plausible change in the future as the present unfolds, marks a hopeful approach to the experience of being. In this sense, hopeful discursive practices are very similar to performatives, those utterances that shape reality as they are being uttered: "performatives get their presentness by being interpreted with reference to the context they create. They get their temporality by a process of elimination since they have no explicit tense marking – they can be neither past nor future. Instead they are interpreted as being indexically linked to the context of utterance, since they create what they index" (Lee 1997: 265-266). As Lee signals following the work of John Austin (1975), performatives connect indexicality and meta-indexicality, a second-order, reflexive interpretative context that creates context in itself. Hope arises from and grants meaning to hopeful environments that are sketched with the utterances of hope. In this play, agency is constantly negotiated in relation to broader structures that overburden individual action.

Statistical representation follows a very similar logic, and in the work of MOE, statistics provided the logical building blocks for a narrative of hope about Colombian political reality, in spite of the sense of living in a world of permanent violence and

stagnant, ever-lasting structures of power. Statistical representation is the language of modernity and progress, and it encompasses a modernist form of representation embedded in a temporality oriented to the future (Asad 2002; Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). The variable correlations that statistics provide connect past, present and future by framing tendencies in retrospective view; by ordering the present in categories of normalcy and outliers and by drafting plausible outcomes through probabilistic operations. Therefore, statistics is the main tool for imbuing the present with future, with “our modern hopes and fears” (Asad 2002: 75). Baselines, interventions, plans and measures are reflections of our complex “ethical plateaux” (Fischer 2003), our hopes to change the present and stir the future, but with a sense that we cannot really change the past, only measure it and represent it.

The day of the congressional elections of 2010, observers were deployed in different voting polls across Colombia. Some international observers supported local observation missions in different towns and cities; many others stayed in Bogotá to carry out an itinerant observation route that would provide additional information to enrich the observation results. As the coordinator for the international missions, and resorting to ethnographic knowledge, I explained to our international observers the importance of their job: with unfamiliar eyes, they would see patterns and behaviors that we the Colombian observers were unable to observe due to the familiarity we had with the voting practices. I designed a route of observation that would take us to different voting sites across socio-economic contexts. We started by going to the wealthiest parts of town and slowly moved to the most peripheral areas of the city, the feared neighborhood of

*Altos de Cazucá*⁵⁰; and ended in Corferias, the largest voting facility in Colombia, to observe the closure of the voting tables and the process of counting of votes.

Previous to Election Day, MOE offered a workshop to explain the use of the observation forms, as well as basic training in electoral legislation and electoral fraud. In the training, MOE staff reenacted different electoral frauds while the trainees acted as election officers and observers. This playful activity that often provoked chuckles and laughter was meant to highlight the role of electoral observers at the voting poll: stoicism and technique. Observers are not there to confront, directly denounce or stop illegal voting practices. Rather, they are a “symbolic presence”—as we so many times explained—recording facts in technical forms to later be used by the heads of MOE to make appropriate recommendations backed up by statistical facts. In this sense, the organization of MOE is built upon a combination of trust and discipline. As Alejandra explained, “the process of construction of all this [the instruments for electoral observation] is totally democratic, but on Election Day this works militarily (...) since we deal with politics, it can easily get out of hand.” If an observer who is not authorized makes inappropriate remarks to the media, or interferes with the electoral process in any way, it can jeopardize the whole mission. Therefore, MOE observers are just eyes and ears, but not mouths. The mouths are statistics, the directors of MOE and some of the coordinators.

⁵⁰ Displaced populations fleeing war in other areas of the country have mainly populated this neighborhood. Urban militias of FARC, Paramilitaries and violent gangs operate in this area.



Electoral Observation Training Workshop

For many of the international observers this non-intervention policy was difficult to understand. The question arose if we actually had any impact or were of any consequence as guardians of democracy. The doubts were heightened by the extended observation exercise. We started our day at 7:00 am in order to be at the first observation site for the setting of the voting polls. The excitement of this moment, seeing the judges⁵¹ set up the tables was soon worn off by the repetition and slowness of Election Day. This initial moment where things are happening is followed by many hours of repetition and tedium. The judges check IDs, hand out ballots, and ask for signatures, over and over again. The itinerant observation, moving around the city, added another component of exhaustion. A Polish observer kept the spirits up by translating jokes from Polish to

⁵¹ Common citizens are required as part of civil duty to perform the role of judges at the voting polls. They hand out the ballot, write down the citizens' IDs and at the end of the day count the votes and record the results in the official forms.

Spanish while we were in the van, but the fierce Andean sun, and the long time in the van, took its toll. By the time we arrived to Corferias to observe the closure of elections at 4pm, we were sunburnt and exhausted.



Election Day – International Observers

Another brief period of excitement was followed by frustration. When arriving at Corferias the police did not want to let us in. My explanations in my Colombian accent were not getting us anywhere. A French observer who had long lived in Colombia resorted to a fake broken Spanish to prove how “international” we were. The police escorted us inside. We were hyped, there was some action going on. Once there, we had been assigned certain tables to observe, from the 840 tables that had been set up in this facility where over 600.000 citizens were registered to vote. The hope was to reinforce

the local observers already there by having a bigger spread to cover the tables chosen to be part of a random statistical sample for MOE to monitor. The closing of the tables started, followed by the vote counting. I had estimated we would be there for one hour. An hour turned into three, and we had not seen the whole process. The voting ballot had recently changed and the judges did not have the tools to properly count the votes. At the tables I was observing, the judges took two hours to count 40 votes and record the information in the institutional forms. This was a common episode at all the tables observed. The judges did not know how to navigate the system. This chaos was enhanced by the presence of “electoral witnesses,” hired by the political parties, whose duty is to observe that the votes for their parties are properly counted. Arguments, exasperation and frustration invaded everyone at Corferias. As observers we could not say anything. And this sense of helplessness, of this surmounting lack of agency, brought the spirits down. As we joked with many of the observers, we reached a point where we wanted to just jump in and count the votes ourselves.

We finally decided to leave. Some tables took six hours to close. And it was not electoral fraud that we saw but the bewildering encounter that citizens have with the technical language of the state, a Kafkaesque nightmare come true. Once back at MOE headquarters we wrote a report to frame the observations we made. All of the observers conveyed how frustrating it was to see that the most salient threat to the sacred ritual of democracy was not even an evil plot but sheer negligence and misinformation. As we reported the facts to the directors, and tossed in some funny anecdotes that built a narrative of adventure, the initial sense of helplessness and frustration quickly transformed in a hopeful outlook that our efforts would pay off. We were writing a

report, and we would also resort to the statistics collected in the forms, to make recommendations to *Registraduría* of how the electoral process could be improved. In the electoral observation ritual, a second-order ritual of observing the ritual of elections, we had experienced the “abeyance of our own agency,” enacted in the stoic role that as observers we had to take, serially followed by reclaiming our own agency by putting together a narrative of intervention backed up by statistical knowledge and direct observation. The presentness of the observation practice, which entails being there without talking or resolving problematic situations, turned into a gaze into a plausible future with a stronger electoral system, a gaze that was materialized through certain recommendations for intervention we as MOE had made. Despite the long-standing structures of power, we were taking action to change them, therefore constructing a narrative of hope.

Close encounters in hope

The negotiation of a sense of agency in a context of asymmetrical power structures that fuels hope also enables horizontal partnerships in macro-political contexts that invert geopolitical power differentials. In the observation missions, civilians from around the world, national and international organizations, and funding agencies come together with a same purpose but for different reasons, thus sharing a sense of hope that looks very different depending on where it is situated. Hope taken as an object of cultural significance, as an affective experience that invokes sheer humanity but at the same time is culturally placed (Crapanzano 2003; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990), is also strategically

mobilized (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001b). And this does not mean that it is less real, or cynical. Rather, the desires for the future articulated in hopeful outlooks reveal the confluence of scales and power differentials in the making and unfolding of local dynamics, what Sassen (2007) has termed “the strategic geography of globalization.” Hope and the actions that deliver it, as well as the intended and unintended consequences these actions bring, are placed in a web of states, institutions, actors and scales. Hope is strategically placed in the most unsuspected places, often to bring hope somewhere else.

This is particularly the case of MOE and the U.S.-based institutions, agencies and NGOs that funded and supported their work. The array of U.S organizations often had a conversation about the U.S. rather than a conversation about Colombia. But Colombia was the place that offered food for thought to think about different, plausible futures not just for Colombia, but also for the U.S. and for the world. MOE was caught up in the middle of these conversations, receiving funding or dealing with the consequences of changes in U.S. international policy, either by reframing electoral monitoring tools, or highlighting parts of their work more aligned with the funders’ goals. MOE receives funds from USAID, technical help from NDI, support from IRI⁵² and has strong partnerships with Global Exchange, an NGO that has done important electoral work in Latin America.

For the elections of 2010, USAID provided major funds for MOE to mobilize the observation missions across the country. USAID also works in partnership and partially channels funds through NDI and IRI. Both of these organizations work with the same purpose: to strengthen political parties around the world and give assistance in the design

⁵² The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI).

and consolidation of best practices for transparency and participation. As Mario Mitre, NDI consultant, explains:

[NDI and IRI] are complementary. We are not contractors of USAID, we have a contractual agreement [with USAID] for smaller amounts of money. USAID gives us the directives that a program should have but we are independent, and they ask us to propose actions based on our experience. NDI is in charge to propose and handle one part and then IRI proposes and handles another part.

NDI has worked with MOE in providing technical expertise to standardize the observation forms and to systematize the electoral observation information. IRI for its part, during the election of 2010 sent an observation mission to an area of Colombia that MOE had no capacity to cover, but where IRI had established a working base.

The involvement of U.S.-based development agencies in developing countries around the world has often been characterized as a late liberal form of imperialism (Arturo Escobar 1995; Williams 1962). “Imperialism means the practice, the theory, and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory (...) In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices” (Said 1994: 9). Although this analytical umbrella articulates certain elements that frame U.S. - Colombian relations, it also overshadows the more complex power dynamics that unfold in contexts where different institutional actors are advancing their political agendas, even when these institutions all come from the metropole. “Americanists,” scholars of U.S. international policy and post-colonial theorists have identified U.S. international power as a contradictory mix of economic and military expansionism, and a redemptory innocence rooted in religious

ideas of “manifest destiny,” justified through ideologies of exceptionalism that posit the U.S. as the true bearer of freedom and democracy (Hardt and Negri 2000; Kaplan and Pease 1994).

But, as Lutz (2008) warns, “empire is in the details.” And it is very difficult to diagnose a monolithic, unidirectional and direct form of imperial power in a world where economic dependencies are not state-centered, where transnational corporations have overtaken some of the functions of states, and where military intervention and international humanitarian solidarity often come in pairs. Lutz calls for an ethnographic research program that focuses on the specific practices, networks and forms of exchange where empire appears, sometimes intertwined with other forms of internationalism that do not imply unilateral forms of dominance.

At the level of the work of USAID, NDI and IRI with MOE it is possible to observe certain dependencies rooted in asymmetrical power. On one hand, at a macro level, one observes the alignment of moral frameworks, a nuanced and culturally rooted form of domination. The synchronicity of goals of MOE and USAID do not come as an imposition but as organically linked. Such paring up is what scholars of empire have seen as the ideological work of the U.S during the twentieth century, a “soft” imposition of a single possible and desired version of political organization (Hardt and Negri 2000).

On the other hand, looking at more specific practices, these asymmetries can be observed in how priorities are delineated. The reliance on funding to operate, and the ideological implications that accepting this kind of funding has, bring uneven forms of power. USAID determines regions of assistance according to its own priorities informed by the debates developing in Washington, D.C. Colombian NGOs and government

agencies apply to grants that require specific work in certain regions or on specific topics. For instance, since President Obama has been in office, U.S. agencies have focused their work in those regions with a high concentration of Afro-colombian populations, which are also the poorest regions in the country. Accordingly, MOE makes sure that these populations are a priority in order to access the resources that USAID provides. MOE therefore participates in a debate about structural racism and governability that is not just bound to Colombia but that is unfolding directly in the United States. Colombia is a drawing board where these debates get extrapolated, sometimes having echoes and consequences in altering and shifting asymmetrical relations of power, both here and there.

But, when looking at other forms of internationalism like civic solidarity, unidirectional forms of power become less obvious. The work of Global Exchange and MOE shows how hope abroad brings hope back home, established through horizontal relations. The drive for Ted Lewis, director of Global Exchange, his motivation to go abroad and sometimes be in dangerous situations, is a problem of human solidarity, and an expectation to realize democracy, no matter where. For him “elections provide a way for people to resolve conflicts,” and fighting for more transparent elections means a more peaceful world. His involvement in Colombia has to do with a debate he and his group hold with the U.S government. Countries abroad provide the space to oversee the U.S. government, that government that, back in the U.S, is very difficult to access. Ted Lewis highlighted his meetings with the U.S ambassador to Colombia and the director of USAID in making his voice heard, meetings that were possible thanks to the partnerships that MOE had with representatives of the U.S. government in Colombia. Back in the

U.S., this level of access is granted to those close to Washington, D.C, but groups with less notoriety seldom have a chance to encounter policy makers.

The work of U.S.-based civil society NGOs abroad unveils how in this world of contemporary empire, the center-periphery relations are visible in these encounters in the “hinterlands,” where anything coming from the center is lumped into the same networks, made easily accessible, regardless of the disparities in the metropole. And this lumping effect holds the possibility of inverting asymmetrical relations, at the expense of empire itself. For Ted, a true believer in “democratic solidarity,” traveling to other countries is a problem of overseeing government and defending democracy in the face of interests that are contrary to it. He works within the networks and logics of empire to invert them. For him this means contesting power back home when the conversation is happening abroad. This unexpected placement show how multiple and disperse state power is in a world where internationalism complicates state apparatuses (Fraser 2007), and therefore how hopeful solidarities can happen in the most unexpected places. By traveling abroad he keeps his hope alive to change things back home, to bring democracy to the U.S and also to change those places with long histories of violence and death like Colombia.

In 2004, Ted was part of one of the early experiments of observation within the U.S. The group observed elections in five states:

Part of the reason why we did that, besides the intrinsic value of what we were doing, we learned a great deal about our country and the weaknesses in our democracy by doing that. It was a big learning curve for us because we had not put our own elections under that lens. But also we wanted to make it clear that international electoral observation wasn't just one thing that people from the U.S did in other countries, it was an active democratic solidarity, in fact we wanted people to use the same techniques and push democracy forward in the U.S. Until the election in 2000, which

was a complete fiasco, the U.S. people were very complacent with the electoral mechanisms in our democracy. And in fact the United States has one of the most backwards electoral practices in the hemisphere because they are very old practices, they are extremely regionalized; in the U.S there are 3000 different election districts (...) we have all kinds of crazy different elections laws which don't mesh. Even places like the Carter Center would not observe elections in the U.S. because the kind of standardization that they insist on as a basic bottom line for possible observation does not exist in the United States.

By bringing back home the practices exported abroad, Ted Lewis reclaimed the hope for democracy for the U.S and for the world. MOE and Ted, in spite of the geopolitical differences, shared an earnest and hopeful belief in a democracy that will eventually come, if citizens take action. For both of them, hope is therefore the point of confluence to negotiate a sense of agency in the face of long-standing, and historically deep, structuring power structures, both here and there. By opening the present to the future, the languages of hope recreate the possibility of a different future, in the present.

Conclusion

On September 2012 President Juan Manuel Santos announced the beginning of a peace process with the FARC guerrilla, the oldest guerrilla in the world. After 50 years of war justified by the uneven and unjust distribution of wealth, Colombia and its other, those territories ruled by the guerrillas and not the state, are laying the grounds to become one. The peace process has spurred many reactions among the Colombian public. Most noticeable are the opinions expressed by former president Álvaro Uribe, who strongly rejects Santos' approach to end the war. Through his twitter account, Uribe voices every day his opposition to Santos' government and expresses his feeling of betrayal. Santos was elected on Uribe's platform and since he has been in power, he has distanced himself from this platform. Constantly quoting the 'third way,' reconciliation and unity, Santos' government has been characterized for its diplomacy, both domestically and internationally. Uribe disagrees with what he considers a "soft" approach that threatens the security achieved during his government through military control. Twitter is Uribe's forum, and in this virtual realm he throws darts at the government and galvanizes a conservative political base. Is Uribe constructing a political project on Twitter? Are social media and media in general the channels through which politics is mobilized?

Twitter has become one of the most used tools by politicians in Colombia. Antanas Mockus heavily relied on social media for his campaign in 2010, as this dissertation has explained throughout. Gustavo Petro, mayor of Bogotá since 2011, has been accused of governing on Twitter rather than governing the city, and Álvaro Uribe exercises his opposition to the government through Twitter. This tool allows politicians

to hold permanent “focus groups” and take the temperature of the Colombian public. Since the introduction of political marketing to Colombian politics in the mid-80s, social research tools have become politicians’ best ally, to the point that, as it was explored in chapter four, focus groups and now social media are increasingly becoming government itself.

But, the big questions still remain, and are worth posing: has political marketing dramatically change the face of politics in Colombia? Are we before a new kind of democracy? Are personhood and citizenship being redefined? The rise of marketing within politics, and the use of new technologies for governments and political leaders to communicate with citizens has brought to the fore these questions every time society has faced major technological innovations. The rise of mass broadcasting media, such as cinema, radio and later television, led social observers to diagnose the “eclipse of the public sphere,” to borrow John Dewey’s words in 1927, or the death of liberalism and the “refeudalization of the public” as Jurgen Habermas sullenly diagnosed in 1961 in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. To others, like Edward Bernays (1951) or Walter Lippman (1927), this realignment of society presented hopeful opportunities for knowledgeable elites to stir the future of uneducated masses in the best interest of the common good. In this new era, Bernays (1951) wrote, democracy is “the freedom to persuade.”

With the popularization and democratization of television in the last decades of the twentieth century, and with the expansion of Internet coverage and social media in the first decades of the twenty-first century, social observers have again stepped in to diagnose a radical redefinition of democracy. Some see the emergence of sophisticated

political marketing technologies fashioned to read the public mind and tailor political debate according to those readings as the true realization of people's will.⁵³ Some others believe the Internet materializes true democracy (Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2007), while yet others have diagnosed the demise of public life and the triumph of individualism (Sloterdijk 2011). The introduction of these technologies to Colombia has opened as well this line of questioning, and political practitioners in Colombia stand as well in different camps. As explored throughout the dissertation, clientelistic arrangements continue to be an important channel through which politics is mobilized. Therefore, some political practitioners see the introduction of new technologies as a radical shift away from this "traditional" form of politics, while others see new technologies just as new public fora that do not really compete with the actual means where politics is produced, that of the face-to-face negotiation of interest.

Working among these expert elites, and exploring their informed outlook on Colombian and world politics, I was very tempted to work within the framework of their questions and preoccupations. Worried about new ways to lure the Colombian public, or to deeply stir political behavior among Colombians, political practitioners are interested in the causes and effects of certain technologies, or if x, y or z conditions are dramatically affecting the way politics is being shaped. By "going native," and participating in the dialogues that these question arise, I got lost. With the introduction of political marketing and new technologies, Colombian politics has radically changed, and at the same time has also remained the same. New forms of coordinating political action have emerged, as

⁵³ The Century of the Self (Curtis 2002), a documentary of the BBC interviews several political strategists in the U.S who share this view. Dick Morrison, a prominent political consultant who has also worked in Colombia, states in the documentary that marketing tools are a way to shape government according to people's will, and therefore realize democracy.

well as novel ways to administrate political behavior. However, the small circles where political interest is negotiated, and that determine the institutional directions of the country, remain integral to Colombia's political life.

As it has been explored throughout the dissertation, the introduction of political marketing intersected with historically deep class structures, to reproduce social segmentation within the political system, despite the country's institutional commitment to political inclusion, participatory politics and multiculturalism, which are consecrated in the political constitution of 1991. This intertwinement has produced a strategic form of politics that combines the kind of politics that political marketing manages, and that travels through the channels of media, and the politics of close-knit networks of allegiance where political interest is negotiated. In this sense, politics has both changed and stayed the same: certain segments of the population experience politics through (new) media, and therefore experience politics through the novelty of those media; while certain others experience them through old-fashion face-to-face politics.

Beyond this descriptive observation, the question about the "newness" of political marketing has injected to the Colombian political system does not lead much further. However, it does bring attention to "technological innovation" in politics, and what using different technologies for political purposes entail. Looking at politics from the technologies and communication practices that mobilize it, offers a more nuanced picture of what political practice looks like in relation to macro-institutional shifts. This is precisely the contribution that a technological understanding of politics brings to the table: seeing politics as a practice that is interconnected to the world, and to an extent

producing the world, and not just as a manufactured ideological construction that overshadows “real” economic and social processes.

In this sense, a technological approach to politics that focuses on the “logics of design” (Handelman 1998), the materials, practices and techniques through which political competition is produced resonates with the preoccupations that Bruno Latour has put to the fore in his explorations of laboratory studies to frame the ecological connections that produce scientific facts. As Latour (1983:159) observes about laboratories, “I claim that, on the contrary, laboratories are among the few places where the differences of scales are made irrelevant and where the very content of the trials made within the walls of the laboratory can alter the composition of society.” Electoral politics behave similarly. The techniques and negotiations of electoral politics are left to a few expert groups and networks of allegiance, what has been identified as the “political field” that contains its own inner distinct logics. However, this field is not disconnected from society as a whole, and it is in dialogue with, and sometimes stirs, macro-logics and macro-structures. Within the political field society is changed, and this change ranges from the different forms of liberal political subjectivity, to how liberalism solves or reproduces its inner contradictions. Paraphrasing Foucault, liberalism is a practice that can be observed in the circles where politics is practiced.

In this way, contrary to Latour, I do not see scales as being irrelevant. I actually call for the attentive observation of the intertwining of economic logics and political logics in how political transactions occur, and the scales at which these intertwinements are operating. This route of analysis steps away from normative understandings of political behavior that have been produced in specific political contexts and that have

been reproduced in scholarly work. Rather, this approach that privileges technologies and practices in the political arena invites the researcher to thoroughly observe how these normative horizons, these forms of order, are produced in the first place. Also, this methodological approach presents a clearer picture of how macro-systems shift in formats that from the surface look as the same good ol' politics.

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